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FAMILY TROUBLES.

A STORY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

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FAMILY TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

ILL OMENS.

“The goddess that with cruel mirth,
The daughters and the sons of earth
Mis-matches, hath a cunning eye
For twisting of a treacherous tie.”

TAYLOR'S PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

A wet, heavy, thundery morning, with dull, sullen drops of rain, which, falling noiselessly, arose again in steam. Dreary was the aspect of the white and misty landscape; and still more dreary the feelings of Arnold Wilton, as gazing upon it with a strange expression,

wherein scorn, weariness, and a desperate determination to brave the worst, were mingled, he exclaimed :

“ A pleasant prospect on one’s wedding-day ! Cheering, truly. But there is one comfort,—it will soon be over ! ”

“ Yes, the executioner is ready, and the cart awaiting the condemned.”

“ Already ? ” said Wilton, with rather a nervous laugh. “ Well, Gifford, you *are* a pleasant fellow, and have always some comforting remark in readiness.”

“ My dear Wilton, it is entirely your own doing. I am sure *I* did my best to save you, but you would not let me. Nothing ever surprised me more, for *you* are the last person I should ever have expected to see in such a scrape.”

Wilton shrugged his shoulders with an air of resignation.

“ She *would* have me, so what was I to do ? ”

“ *I* should have resisted,” answered Gifford.

"But the deed is done."

"Not *quite*."

"At least, *I* am done for. It is too late to draw back *now* ; so say no more about it," answered Wilton, hastily.

"Come along then. Let us get it over," said Gifford, leading the way to the carriage, whilst his friend followed, with the air of a man resolved not to reflect upon the future.

"Pshaw !" exclaimed the latter, as he took his seat, and flung himself desperately back into a corner : "If one *must* be married, I would just as soon have her as anybody else. And there is no doubt that *she* is very fond of *me*."

"Hum ! Philosophical, it seems," growled Gifford ; adding, *sotto voce*, "But these women are the very deuce !"

"Besides, my father wished it," added Wilton ; "and I half promised him when he was dying."—

Here he abruptly broke off ; and turning to the carriage window, looked out upon shrubs

and flowering plants, bowed down, as it seemed by the mere pressure of the heavy atmosphere; and not another word was spoken till the carriage stopped before the gates of a quiet village church, where festive preparations had been made. The well-worn steps were overarched with flowers and evergreens; a rustic crowd had gathered; and the school-children, dressed in white, in honour of the approaching ceremony, strewed the path they were about to tread with fragile blossoms. Wilton regarded these preparations,—this unwelcome scene,—with an air of irrepressible disgust; and turning to his friend, said, almost angrily:

“Pleasant! They might have spared me all this folly, when I only asked to have it over quietly.”

“Well, never mind! It will be all the same a month hence. I suppose it pleases them, and it can’t hurt you,” was the soothing answer.

Wilton said no more; but those words—

“a month hence,” fell like lead upon his heart; for the bells which would ring so merrily when that rite which *ought* to be so sacred, was completed, would sound like the death-knell of liberty and pleasure.

Another minute, and he was standing by the side of her to whom he was about to bind himself—perhaps for life! Certainly till death should part them; he shuddered as, their brief greeting over, they moved forward to the altar-rails. The lady was very pale;—almost ghastly, as if from illness and anxiety,—and as she looked up at him for a moment, and away again, she absolutely shook from head to foot; for never did affianced husband look less like a lover;—and she loved him passionately,—madly!

The ceremony proceeded; witnessed by the near relations, and a few old friends of the bride, and by Clarence Gifford, who alone accompanied Wilton. It came to the point at which the ring had to be produced; but then, he, who had hitherto endured the ordeal with

firmness, was seized by a sudden nervous tremor, and the golden circlet rolled upon the pavement. An ill omen;—or so the superstitious amongst the spectators thought;—but Gifford recovered it, and it was placed in due form upon the finger of the bride: who colourless, and almost fainting from intensity of feeling, could only by the strongest effort sustain herself throughout the remainder of the service.

All was over; the register signed, congratulations spoken, and the ringers ready to perform their office. Agatha Kennedy, leaning upon that arm which should be now her stay until the end,—her husband's arm,—prepared to leave the church; but just as they emerged into the porch, a flash of lightning quivered through the yew-trees. Both started; and her lace dress caught upon a nail; but hastily moving onwards, regardless of all consequences,—far too much pre-occupied to think of signs or portents,—she tore it away, and trode the soft, damp path with the air of

one returning rather from a funeral, than a wedding.

Out rang the joy-bells; mingling with the ominous roll of thunder, which pealing ever louder and louder, gave warning of a rapidly approaching storm. The wedding-guests cast more than one anxious glance towards the lowering heavens, and hurried towards the shelter of that house, from which Agatha had gone forth—to return a bride. Down came the rain, and darker grew the sky; so dark, except when lit by brilliant gleams of lightning, that those who assembled at the marriage feast, were shrouded in more than twilight gloom. Wilton sat silent; and those who had been preparing speeches for the glad occasion, had no heart to display their oratory, for it would have seemed a mockery.

The bride had disappeared to change her dress; torn, damp, and clinging, from the misadventures of that disastrous morning; and to lay aside the wreath and veil, which made her wan countenance look still more ghastly.

“Let me be alone for a few moments,” she requested; and her wish was granted.

Then, throwing herself back in her chair, she pressed her hands upon her eyes, whilst her working features betrayed the agony of her spirit. She had risked all; dared all, to attain her desire; and now that she *had* attained it, she was still as far from happiness as ever. She had long loved Wilton,—vainly, as it seemed; then circumstances had thrown them much together. He was dangerously ill; she nursed and tended him, thus winning gratitude, but nothing more. She knew it, yet had not courage to give him up; trusting, (as women too often trust,) that she should gain more than mere gratitude at last; when he, seeing her devotion, *must* have something better to bestow in return; and thus, silently, secretly, without unmaidenly effrontery, yet still more boldly than a woman ought, she had worked on—till she gained—if not her object,—at least the promise of his name and hand. She knew at the time he had no more to give *her*,

yet she had not pride or generosity sufficient to refuse his offer ; on the contrary, accepting it with eagerness, under the flattering delusion, that she, who loved him so dearly, could make him happy.

But at this moment she perceived her error, and would have given worlds to undo that which was now irrevocable. Better,—far better,—to have given up her most dearly-cherished hope, than, by forcing herself upon him whose love she coveted, have turned all kindlier feelings to disgust. She had seen him shudder ; she had felt him shrink from her, when their hands met,—joined together with all due solemnity. It was however, now too late ; for they were husband and wife, bound by the most sacred obligations to love, cherish, and abide with one another—until death.

“And oh!” she thought, “that death might soon release me,—fool that I have been! I would willingly lay down my life to leave him free!”

Sick at heart, half-fainting, and humiliated,

now that the scales had fallen from her eyes, and she perceived her error,—she at length arose to put her dress in order for that journey which the storm alone delayed ; and approaching the glass, gazed upon that face, which never beautiful, was now livid and drawn with misery, and rendered still more unattractive by the lightning's lurid glare. Sad, sunken eyes, with dark circles round them, a thin face, and a slight figure, which once graceful from that very circumstance, was now worn and shrunk from feverish anxiety ;—this was what Agatha beheld with shame and sorrow ; and for the first time, she absolutely despaired.

The storm raged for some time, and then passed on,—before she had completed her preparations. But at length she was summoned, and descended ; thinking :

“Oh, that my mother had been living ! Then I should have had a surer guide.”

Perhaps it might have been so, for she was an only child, and her father's heart was set

upon this match; achieved with toil, to bring forth but this bitter fruit—remorse! He embraced, and delivered her into her husband's keeping, and the latter courteously handed her into the carriage; taking his place by her side, to set out upon a silent, melancholy expedition.

CHAPTER II.

TOO LATE.

"Haste, haste, he lies in wait, he's at the door.
Insidious death ! should his strong hand arrest,
No composition sets the pris'ner free."

YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

A YEAR afterwards,—and Wilton sat in a dark chamber, beside the couch of his dying wife, who utterly worn out by bodily and mental suffering, was now hastening to that surest place of rest—the grave. Always thin and delicate, she was now wasted almost to a shadow ; and her thick dark hair rendered the colourless hue of her cheek more striking from the force of contrast, as her white, ghostly form stood out in wan relief from the gloomy twilight of the room where she was lying.

It has been said that people never die of disappointed love, or sorrow—*only*: though, where there is a predisposition to disease, the grief that preys upon them may develop that disease,—especially where there is a consumptive tendency. But however that may be, poor Agatha was dying—of consumption,—probably aggravated by mental trouble; and its baleful fire shone with unearthly brightness from her hollow eyes.

“So young! But five-and-twenty! It is hard to die so early! And just when she had gained her heart’s desire,—had everything most calculated to make her happy! And to leave her child, too! It seems very, very, sad!”

So said an old acquaintance, hearing of her illness, and judging (as people generally judge their neighbour’s affairs), from mere external evidence. But Agatha had *not* attained her heart’s desire; nor did she regret the prospect of an early death,—except in-

deed, for her child's sake,—not a month old yet, and weakly from its birth.

“Perhaps it may follow me,” she thought. “And it were best and safest so! *He* will not miss it,—or at least, will soon forget its loss—its very existence,—as he may forget its mother, when relieved from the burden of her presence. I am sick of this life: all is vanity and disappointment. Rest, rest, rest, is all I desire and pray for, and I trust that *that* will soon be mine! Total forgetfulness—unbroken sleep; peace for this weary brain, which aches and throbs incessantly, and for this miserable, breaking heart! And for my little one I ask a refuge from the storms and sorrows of this cruel world. Blessed are they who die in infancy, before they have known trouble and temptation! Love, unconquerable, was my only fault,—and oh, how deeply have I suffered for it,—do still suffer *now*.”

She turned those eyes, once dim with sorrow and anxiety, now so over-brilliant, to her

husband's countenance, and saw there the plainest traces of a wearing influence, which had changed his former gaiety to gravity and sternness, as if he were in truth weighed down beneath some heavy burden, which never could be forgotten or shaken off. She sighed heavily, thinking: "He is changed. And *I* have wrought this change. Why did I delude myself into the belief that I could win his love—could make him happy? What would I not give now to have been less selfish,—more clear-sighted—ere it was too late? I might have known that a wife thus forced upon him could but inspire dislike—perhaps disgust! *That* is the bitterest thought of all! To be despised and regarded with contempt;—and by *him*, to ensure whose happiness I would have died! But it is my own doing, and I only blame myself. Kind he has been,—attentive, courteous; and if he *felt* scorn, he has carefully repressed its outward signs; but I loathe myself for that absence of all proper pride

and delicacy which permitted me to grasp at words reluctantly wrung forth, and to bind myself for life to one, who I saw even then was longing to be free *for life!* It is well that life is almost ended. He *will* soon be free;—and *I* shall be at peace. Thank heaven for that hope! And may his future life be happier! I ask no more.”

Her eyes closed wearily, as if to shut out everything connected with the world which she was leaving, and she lay upon her sofa, still and white as a sculptured form of marble on a tomb. Her husband drew nearer; bending down to listen if she yet breathed; and aroused by the consciousness that he was so near,—and so anxious,—her eyes re-opened with a loving “God bless you, Arnold, for your care of me! But do not stay here. This is dreary work for you.”

“I wish it,” was the steady answer. “Lie still, Agatha; do not tire yourself with talking.”

“Let me speak, if you remain here. I

have much to say, and should have said it sooner,—but that—when you showed so much consideration for me,—I was afraid of wearying you.—”

She paused, and looked up with such a pleading glance, that Wilton was conscience-stricken to think his wife had need to stand upon such ceremony; but comforting himself with the reflection: “It was the force of circumstances; not my doing;” he turned towards her with the softened air which he had never worn until it was evident that she was sinking rapidly, and taking her hand, said in a tone of kindness: “Why do you say so? You know,—or if you do not, I now tell you, that I would do anything to make you easy.”

The dying woman smiled, and pressed his hand.

“Those kind words alone have made me more than easy—almost happy; for they seem a sign that the past—has been forgiven.”

“Don’t talk thus!” exclaimed Wilton, in sudden agitation. “Let it sleep. It cannot be recalled.”

“True. I wish for your sake,—that it were *not* impossible.”

“You fatigue and excite yourself by dwelling upon it.—”

“Ah,” sighed Agatha, “it was a great mistake.”

“But since,” resumed her husband, hastily, “it is useless to think about *that* now, speak to me rather about the present, or the future. What are your wishes? Is there anything that I can do to please you? Anything to give you rest? To amuse, or make your state of health less painful?”

“No, Arnold; I have all that I can wish for. You have never suffered me to be neglected. All that I have to ask, is—that you will be a tender father to *our* baby.—your poor weakly, wailing child.”

“Surely,” said Wilton, looking troubled,

"it is unnecessary to remind me of my duty towards *it*,—poor, unconscious little creature ! You may safely trust me *there*."

"To do your *duty* towards it ! But to *love* it ! Arnold, do not despise it for its mother's sake,—or because, like her, it is a poor, sickly thing. It may soon follow her, and relieve you of—"

"Hush, Agatha ; you do not know how much you hurt me by this want of confidence. By all that I hold sacred, I promise to do everything in my power to shield it from all sorrow ;—to promote its future welfare."

Agatha again said, gratefully and fervently :

"God bless you ! Now my mind is set at ease, for I know that you will never break your promise. And perhaps it may live to be a comfort to you. It has your eyes, and something of your look already. I am thankful that it is so,—that my baby is not in the least like *me* ; for then—it never can remind you of its mother. But," she continued, with

a sudden return of anxiety: "you may marry again. I believe you *will*. And then!"

Her husband started.

"Why will you distress yourself,—and me? It is not probable."

"Nothing is more so," was the calm, sad answer. "You are not yet thirty, and another may be able to do that which I had never power to do,—to make you happy. Nay, let me speak; you told me that I might; and do not turn from me; I wish to see your face; for *I* always loved *you*, and I shall not look upon it much longer. I will not distress you, after I have spoken this once; but I *must* speak now."

"Yes; tell me all you wish," was the low answer; as Wilton once more raised his head, disclosing a countenance as pale and almost as worn and weary as her own. She gazed upon it sorrowfully.

"You *have* been sorely tried, but that is past; or will be very soon. And all that I

desire to say is, that I trust you *may* find some one to console you,—to blot out the recollection of your sufferings. I only ask that you will not permit her to neglect, or be unkind to my poor child; nor to win all your affections from it, to concentrate them upon her own.”

A rush of passionate, remorseful feelings seized on Wilton, and he sank down upon his knees beside her, endeavouring to soothe her fears, and make some slight atonement for past coldness; for now he perceived that had he formerly shown more warmth, more real consideration for the feelings of her whose only fault was the blind impetuosity of her love for him, she might even now have been a happy and companionable wife, and in a state to watch over the poor infant whose birth had only added to her trouble. But she lay there a wreck, and he the guilty cause! This thought was terrible, and he bent down, and sobbed in agony; entreating pardon for the irrevocable past.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW HOPE.

“ Hope exalts ;
And though much bitter in our cup is thrown,
Predominates, and gives the taste of heaven.”

. YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

MONTHS had passed over before the young widower was able to shake off the oppression caused by his wife's illness, and the melancholy circumstances of her death, sufficiently to seek refuge in society from his gloomy thoughts, and the monotonous routine of his lonely home ; and even then, he seemed to shun all old acquaintances, giving the preference to such persons as knew little or nothing of his former history.

Amongst the latter, was a family named

Fielding, who, living within a few miles of Stapleton, contrived gradually to withdraw him from his hermit-like mode of life, and win him to take some interest and share in their pursuits. At first he drew back coldly from their advances, but the warmth with which they sought him, and the harmony and refinement of the picture which their home-life placed before his eyes, insensibly allured him from his retreat; though the attractions of an only daughter, instead of hastening his decision, caused him to hesitate long ere yielding to his inclination. He had suffered too much already, to rush willingly into danger for the second time; but his life was aimless, cheerless; all the gaiety of its unmarried days destroyed for ever; and its very dreariness induced him to seek solace in cultivated feminine society.

Men, in prosperous times, may give the preference to that of their own sex; but when trouble comes, they instinctively feel that women are more tender-hearted and unselfish,

more ready to listen to the story of their sorrows, —and not unfrequently, to share them too; consoling, soothing, bidding hope revive. And Mrs. Fielding and her daughter Alice were peculiarly gentle,—to *all* persons, but especially towards Wilton,—who was soon induced to confide in them, as in two tried and valued relations of his own.

“So, Mrs. Fielding,” he observed, with a heavy sigh, one morning when the trio were sitting together upon the terrace at Mountsford, and he had been giving them a shadowy outline of the past, “you see I am not so unreasonable as might at first appear; and when I say that I have done with life, I speak simply of its hopes and pleasures. For what can remain for one who has already tasted all its bitterness, and looks to the future only as to an unutterably, unchangeably dreary period, a mere barren plain,—with a dark resting place in the far distance? Surely you will allow that *that* is not the most invigorating prospect?”

L. J.

He spoke with vehement bitterness; and Mrs. Fielding, who had been gently lecturing him upon the listless, despondent tone of his ordinary conversation, which caused her to mingle blame with sympathy, now gazed sadly on the worn, though handsome features of the speaker; her calm eyes quieting for a moment the restless, melancholy expression of his own.

“You are wrong to say so,” was her answer, “and you know it. No one still in possession of their bodily and mental faculties, has a right to say that all is over; that there is nothing left to live or hope for; nothing to look forward to but death. You are comparatively young”—(he smiled, half-scornfully :) “nay,” added Mrs. Fielding, with unusual severity, “you make me angry now; and with your child, especially, you ought to strive against despondent thoughts.”

He looked half ashamed; replying hastily:

“I do, I *try* to shake them off. But no-one

knows, who has not felt as I feel, what it is to stand alone amidst their sorrow; with no past to which they dare look back for comfort; and no future to —”

Here Alice, who, though listening attentively, had hitherto been silent, now interrupted him, by saying, softly :

“ You are not alone. You *have* an object in the future.”

Wilton started ; and turning towards her, was struck by the beautiful expression of her fair young face. Her eyes were lighted by the holiest pity, her cheeks flushed by the timidity which struggled with her evident concern ; and the bright brown hair, which rippled back from her white forehead, seemed to shade an angel’s brow ; so young, and pure, and innocent she looked. That graceful figure, slender as a child’s, yet bearing the delicately rounded outlines of early womanhood, was tremulous with feeling,—not mere selfish feeling, but that which seems spiritual and divine ; so forgetful is it of its own individual

sorrows, so deeply sensitive to those of others.

No wonder that the heart of the young widower was touched by sympathy so artless and sincere; or that, had he obeyed the impulse of the moment, he would have bent his knee, and kissed the hand of Alice, devoutly as ever enthusiast pressed his lips upon some sacred relic; but he restrained himself, and only answered with a look and tone of fervent gratitude.

“Ah, you mean my child! I *will* rouse myself for his sake. Yet my life *is* lonely,—drearier than can be described. If anyone were near to help me—”

“God is always near,” said Alice, gently.

Wilton changed colour, and bent down;—distressed.

“If I could but *feel* that! I *believe*; and yet, when I am so utterly miserable, I feel all alone;—as if the heavens and earth were alike dark, and there was no hope, no comfort

anywhere. Perhaps I have deserved that it should be so ; but—”

He paused enquiringly, as if he hoped that Alice would say something reassuring ; but she could not trust her voice. One glance of sympathy, and her eyes fell, to conceal the tears which trembled on their lids. Yet more than one bright drop broke forth, glittering as it descended to her bosom ; and he noted it, and blessed her for her angel-like compassion.

Mrs. Fielding spoke in her stead ; softly and seriously ; as if from firm conviction.

“ What you feel is only natural ; but you must try to overcome it, and the darkness will vanish before the light of faith. We know who sends our troubles, and that He is all goodness ; sending them in mercy. Think of this. Trust Him, and seek Him as you would an earthly friend ; *then* you will not feel so lonely. New hopes, and new duties, will arise ; your child will console you, and all may yet be well.”

Wilton still looked doubtful, but he only

“ Ah, if I could but follow your advice !”

Alice looked up suddenly, exclaiming :

“ Only try !—*sincerely* ; and you will not find it difficult.”

“ To *you* it comes so naturally,” was the answer, “ that it is impossible for you to realise the difficulty.” He broke off abruptly, and then said : “ But I will do my best. I promise.”

“ Thank you, for saying so,” cried Alice ; as warmly as though that promise immediately concerned herself.

Their eyes met, and a mutual feeling seemed to draw them nearer to each other. He resumed :

“ How dared I say my life was lonely, cheerless, and devoid of hope, when two such dear friends bear with me so kindly ; care to share my troubles, and desire to soothe them ? Truly I am very selfish to inflict them upon you so remorselessly, but such is generally the penalty paid by pure, disinterested sympathy.”

“ We pay it cheerfully,” said Mrs. Field-

ing, smiling; "well rewarded if our efforts meet with some success."

"Then to put your kindness still more to the test, I am about to ask a favour," said Wilton, looking from Mrs. Fielding to her daughter. "Will you come to Stapleton, and see the child?"

"Gladly," returned the elder lady. "I have often thought about it, and so has Alice; and I should have proposed it long ago, had I not feared that such an invasion would have been displeasing to you."

"Displeasing? *That* would be impossible. I only wish you *had* suggested it."

And again he glanced at Alice; who said quickly:

"How old is the little thing?"

"Nearly a year old;" (with a deep sigh). "Poor little creature, it is wonderful to me that it has lived so long."

"But it is tolerably strong now; is it not?"

"Much stronger than I ever hoped or ex-

pected; yet I often think that it can never live to grow up, and sometimes it seems to me that it were better so; this world is so full of thorns and briers."

"Oh, Mr. Wilton, it is wicked to speak so! And of *your* child—your only child! I trust that it may live to be a blessing to you," answered Alice, with unusual vehemence.

He regarded her earnestly, enquiring:

"Do *you* think me wicked! Then I fear that I am hopeless."

"Nay, I did not mean that," said Alice, colouring at her boldness. "All I meant was—"

"That we ought not to dispose so lightly,—even in thought,—of *any* human life," said her mother, coming to the rescue; "for we never know what great purpose even the meanest or weakliest of beings may be destined to fulfil. This thought often forces itself upon me when I go into any of the poor cottages in the neighbourhood, and seeing nothing but misery on every side, am tempted to imagine

that in such an apparently hopeless case, death would indeed be a happy release. But it is not for *us* to judge."

Wilton was silenced by this mild rebuke, and a pause ensued ; broken at length by Alice asking :

"Will you come in? Luncheon must be ready."

He assented; and all rose to enter the house; the two ladies leaving him alone for a few minutes, while they laid aside their walking costume. He employed the interval by first standing lost in thought, and then rousing himself to examine various small matters which gave character to the apartment. It was large, airy, and in all its adornments bore witness to the refined taste of its inmates. Furnished with equal simplicity and comfort, there was no over-crowding of useless matters; no pretentious display of china, Bohemian glass, or other showy ornaments, such as ordinary women like to heap upon their *chiffonnières* and tables, no gay annuals to tantalise or repel; but well-

bound standard works, intended to be *read*; good engravings from paintings by the first modern masters, and a few beautiful water-colour drawings, on the delicate grey and gold paper with which the walls were covered. Plants in stands were arranged outside the windows in the cool verandah, and flowers, tastefully disposed in elegant white frosted glasses upon the tables; diffusing a sweet, but not too powerful scent. A *few* ornaments, in most cases fashioned in imitation of some pure classic model, met Wilton's eyes as he gazed around him; but he was more interested by the open piano, with a touching Scotch ballad left upon the music-desk, and by a book of sketches, over which he had often seen Alice bending, brush in hand. Taking up the latter, he began to examine them; accidentally shaking out a dried forget-me-not, and a few lines of poetry, pencilled in haste as some sudden image presented itself to the mind of the youthful author, and which he honourably replaced without suffering his eyes to wander

over them; though, feeling as he then did, even such a liberty might have been deemed almost excusable.

But he had seen enough to confirm him in the opinion that all Alice's tastes were refined and womanly, and that if not gifted with extraordinary talents, she possessed qualities which were far more likely to promote, both her own happiness, and the happiness of those with whom she lived:—namely, good sense, warm feelings, quick perceptions, and the utmost delicacy and purity of mind. He recalled their conversation of the morning, and the promised visit to his home and child; indulging in hopes so bright and dazzling, that, contrasted with his former despairing state, they appeared like the sun, bursting through and dispelling gloomy thunder clouds; nor did the vision vanish when the cause of it was once more present, looking all grace and gentleness as she addressed him, moving softly forward in her floating muslin dress.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WIDOWER CONSOLED.

But where is she, the bridal flower,
That must be made a wife ere noon?
She enters, glowing like the moon
Of Eden on its bridal bower :

On me she bends her blissful eyes,
And then on thee : they meet thy look,
And brighten like the star that shook
Betwixt the palms of paradise.

TENNYSON'S IN MEMORIAM.

NOT many days were suffered to elapse before Mrs. Fielding and her daughter paid the anxiously-expected visit to Stapleton; driving themselves thither in their low pony-carriage, and through green shady summer lanes, which made such exercise the greatest luxury. The scenery of that neighbourhood, (in a richly

cultivated midland county), was pleasing and peaceful, rather than grand or striking, though it offered many charming pictures to the eye; gleaming water winding through soft meadows, breezy woods, and faint blue distances, with lights and shadows flitting over them. Their route, between wild, high hedges full of flowers, with now and then a gnarled old oak or elm, flinging fantastic boughs above their heads, had also power to call forth more than one admiring look and exclamation, as the two ladies passed onward, and over the strong chequer-work of shade and sunshine where the latter forced its way through interlacing branches, as if determined that the aspect of the country should be gay. And as the features of an old friend, (which, though perhaps homely in themselves, are yet loved for his own sake), instead of wearying by their familiarity, daily disclose new beauties, so that rural scenery became ever dearer to the eyes of those who had looked upon it through long, peaceful years.

At length they found themselves at Stapleton; and passing through the lodge gates, drove beneath a shadowy avenue of trees, up to the front of the large, ancient, rambling mansion: pleasant in aspect when the summer sunshine fell upon it, but dreary beyond expression, when in storm and darkness, it was inhabited by a solitary tenant; or rather, by one desponding, widowed heart, and a hundred gloomy memories flitting through it, spirit-like.

Wilton came forward to receive his guests; and as he handed them from the carriage, his countenance bore no traces of the bitter thoughts, which had, until lately, rendered it so grave and careworn. It was lighted up with satisfaction, when he said:

“So you have taken pity upon me! This is very kind.”

He addressed Mrs. Fielding; but as he spoke, glanced, as if involuntarily, towards Alice, of whose hand he had just gained possession. She smiled softly; and with such

encouragement, he clasped the little hand more closely, nor released his hold until she was beneath his roof.

"We were not likely to forget our promise; and we wished so much to see your little Arthur," was her answer, as they paused for a moment in the spacious hall.

His look expressed more than gratitude,—the most passionate admiration; for, with the exception of some boyish passages, forgotten long ago, he, widower as he was, had never loved till now; and Alice felt this with an inward thrill.

Their host led them into one of the reception-rooms, and after a little general conversation, at her request the child was sent for; and the nurse soon afterwards appeared with it; but paused irresolutely at the door, saying apologetically :

"He's such a timid child, that I am almost afraid to bring him in; for he's sure to cry at the sight of strangers."

"Oh! he will not cry. All children come

to me," said Alice, springing forward, with arms outstretched to receive him.

"Baby is not frightened?" she continued, in a soft, caressing tone.

Her confidence was not without foundation, for the little fair, delicate-looking creature, instead of, according to his usual custom, hiding his head and sobbing on his nurse's shoulder, laughed with delight, and made a motion to be taken into her arms.

"Well, I'm sure, ma'am," said the nurse, "you do surprise me, for you've found the way to his heart at once; and that's what no one ever did before."

Alice laughed gaily, and glancing back at Wilton, answered:

"I am all the prouder of my conquest. Baby means to be good friends with me."

Then, clasping the little boy to her bosom, she kissed him in the impulsive manner, which, springing from the warm affection of her nature, always affected the child's father so powerfully.

She talked to him as women talk to children, without fear of being thought ridiculous ; she made him laugh by shaking her white finger playfully ; she permitted him to seize upon her rings and bracelets, pull her hair, and take what liberties he pleased ; appearing to enjoy his innocent advances, quite as much as he enjoyed her notice.

Wilton drew nearer, and taking refuge behind her chair, said softly :

“ Yes ; he is happy now,—and so am I.”

Alice looked up brightly ; answering :

“ Then you are neither of you difficult to please !”

Mrs. Fielding was speaking to the nurse ; and finding that he might safely do so, Wilton was emboldened to continue, with increasing earnestness :

“ I am not so sure of that ; but it would be the greatest blessing to both of us, if—there was some one to supply his mother’s place.”

Alice’s face was instantly suffused with crimson ; and she bent down over the child,

embracing it, as if to give her feelings some relief. At length, raising her head a little, but still looking down, she said, as though to change the subject :

“He is like you; yet not altogether. Does he resemble—?”

Here she paused, fearing she might have asked a painful question.

“His mother? Yes; in some degree,” returned Wilton, calmly. “Would you like to see her picture?”

Alice was surprised, but answered with sincerity that she should.

“That is, if you do not mind my seeing it,” she added.

“No; I wish it. Come into the next room; but let me take the child first.”

Little Arthur offered some resistance, but Alice rose from her seat, saying :

“Mamma, you would like to have him now. I will lend him to you, (though not for long,) for Mr. Wilton wants to show me something.”

And gently contriving to disengage herself,

without changing his happy smiles to tears, she placed him in her mother's arms, and accompanied Wilton through a door which led into a smaller room ; panelled with dark oak, like the one in which they had been sitting.

The latter advanced towards the fire-place, and pointing out a small oval painting of a lady, dressed in white, and with an anxious, melancholy expression stamped upon her features, said briefly :

“ That is Arthur's mother.”

Alice stood before the picture with somewhat of the same silent reverence with which she would have stood in presence of the dead. Tears,—ever at the service of the unfortunate,—started to her eyes, and it was some little time before she spoke. But at length she said :

“ He is a little like her,—but not much. Poor child !”

“ You may well say so,” was the low answer. “ But have you no pity for the father ?”

She looked up,—then down again.

“Surely you cannot doubt it.”

And whilst speaking, she unconsciously offered him her hand; which he clasped tightly, and leading her into the deep recess of a bay-window, said hurriedly :

“Shall I tell you her last words? *She* wished me to find someone to supply her place.”

Then with the same vehement earnestness, as though he feared some interruption, he besought her, for his own sake, for his child's,—and even for that of his lost wife, to hear him favourably; touching with a skill taught by love, the tenderest chords of her pure womanly nature. And there, as it were in the sacred presence of the dead, Alice consented to become his comforter, and a mother to the helpless infant, which had as yet scarcely known a mother's care.

Mrs. Fielding was willing to bestow her daughter upon Wilton; otherwise she would have shunned this visit to his house; and though Alice's father and elder brother raised

some slight opposition to the union of her, a girl of twenty, with a widower ten years older than herself, it was gradually overcome ; and all the more easily that the match was in all other respects likely to prove an advantageous one. Consequently, little more than two years after his first ill-omened marriage, Arnold Wilton stood before the altar for the second time ; a happier, though a wiser and a sadder man ; and on this occasion, no dark, brooding thunder-clouds, no accident, trifling, but for time and circumstances, yet by them magnified into importance, jarred upon his feelings. All was harmony.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY TROUBLES.

His heart, now passive, yields to thy command;
Secure it thine, its key is in thine hand;
If thou desert thy charge, and throw it wide,
Nor heed what guests there enter and abide,
Complain not if attachments low and base
Supplant thee in it, and usurp thy place.

COWPER.

No mother could have shown more tenderness to her own child, than Alice Wilton in her relations with her little step-son; nor when an infant of her own laid claim to her affection, did her manner towards Arthur undergo the slightest change. It was only natural that she should love *her* child best; and yet, the closest observer of her actions could not have detected the most trifling difference in her

treatment of the two ; except that perhaps she was even more gentle and forbearing where Arthur was concerned, because he was not only delicate in constitution, but peculiarly sensitive. She was proud of having from the first won his love and confidence, and resolved that so far as it rested with herself, nothing should ever shake that implicit faith, but that he should ever look upon her as a mother ; appealing to her upon all occasions, and going to her for comfort in all childish troubles. That which most grieved her, was, that whilst her own little Reginald was fearless as he was affectionate, Arthur was constitutionally timid ; insomuch that he not only shrank from strangers, but appeared even to regard his father with a kind of dread.

It was the more distressing, that Wilton seemed annoyed by his mistrustful manner, and consequently became harsh in his demeanour towards him ; a line of conduct which was anything but re-assuring, as Alice frequently hinted,—though in vain. The graver and

more displeased the father seemed, the more sensitive and timid did the child become; flying to his step-mother for protection, and clinging to her hand or dress with all the energy of nervous apprehension; neither commands nor entreaties having power to make him quit her side.

“Send him away,” was often the conclusion of these scenes. “That child provokes me beyond endurance, and I will either cure him of such conduct, or he shall not come into my presence.”

Then Alice would plead for him.

“Be patient, Arnold. The child is not strong, and your severity alarms him. Only let him feel that you are fond of him, instead of permitting him to fancy that you are always angry; then he will doubtless gain more confidence.”

“I have tried,—but it is his nature; and a cowardly, suspicious nature it appears to be. How different from our little Reginald! *That*

child fears nothing, and is always glad to see me."

Such was the severe answer that was generally returned; and Alice had to lead the young offender from the room; to sob in the nursery with a vague sense of disgrace. She reasoned with the child; she tried to re-assure him; but though he might promise to do better, when the time of trial came, his courage always failed, and the same results occurred to grieve her.

"Why will you not go to papa, my darling?" she would enquire. "Do you not know that he loves you, and is only angry when you seem afraid of him?"

"I can't help it. I don't want to be naughty," was the piteous answer. "I try to do as you tell me; but when papa looks cross at me, I *can't* be good. I never feel afraid of *you*, mamma." And then the little arms would clasp themselves around her neck, and a soft cheek would be laid caressingly to hers;

she, whispering comfort to the tiny creature, and trusting that, as he grew older, he would gain more confidence in his father's kind intentions. But in the meantime, Wilton became accustomed to treat him coldly, taking little notice of him ; whilst, on the other hand, Reginald was encouraged to speak freely, received with every demonstration of affection, and made to feel that *he was always* welcome.

Arthur felt the difference keenly, and longed to participate in the endearments lavished upon his more fortunate brother, but did not dare to come forward, because he was firmly impressed with the idea, that for some mysterious cause, his father did not love *him*. Doubtless it was his own fault, but he could not help it ; he supposed that he was naughty, but in what respect, he never could discover ; and tormented himself with vague imaginings, such as children of his disposition alone create. Jealous of Reginald, he was not ; for he was fond of his little brother, and

looked upon these caresses as his right; but he could not help coveting some share in them, and making himself miserable because it was withheld.

It was some slight consolation to Mrs. Wilton to perceive that the two children were much attached to one another; and her constant endeavour to cultivate all brotherly feelings, and to fortify them against evil ones; the burden of her teaching being:—

“Love one another, my darlings. Arthur, remember that Reginald is younger than you, and that it rests with you to set him a good example. Reginald, always do what your elder brother wishes; give up your will to his; for I am sure he will only desire that which is right.”

These lessons were not unavailing, and no children were ever more gentle and considerate towards each other; the grand maxim of unselfishness being at the root of all.

Such was the state of affairs at Stapleton, when Arthur attained his eighth year; Mrs.

Wilton being their only teacher; and still there seemed no hope of improvement in this one respect. For instance, they were seated at their lessons one bright morning, when Mr. Wilton suddenly entered the quiet oak-wainscotted apartment, appropriated to their studies, attended by two large dogs, which generally accompanied him on his rounds.

Arthur, startled by their unexpected entrance, rose from his seat in nervous haste, and according to custom, flew to take refuge by his step-mother's side; whilst Reginald, whose only feeling was unmixed delight, sprang forward to them, and threw his arms around the dogs, to pat them, and enjoy their rough caresses.

"That's my own boy," cried Mr. Wilton, addressing the latter. "Afraid of nothing, like a brave little man." Then, turning contemptuously towards Arthur: "Why," he enquired, "do not *you* take a lesson from your younger brother? Come forward, child!"

(The boy only shrank still further from him).
“ Ah, coward !” he continued, with an air of indescribable disgust, “ I see plainly that you are hopeless. Are you not ashamed of yourself? You *ought* to be ; for any girl would be ashamed of such faint-heartedness.”

Poor Arthur was too much crushed down by shame and sorrow, to take any notice of this taunt, save by sinking his head upon his hands, and shedding tears of agony ; which, however, only added to his father’s anger.

“ Leave the room !” exclaimed the latter.
“ You disgrace, not only yourself, but *me*, by such behaviour. And, another time, beware how you betray your cowardly propensities. It shall pass this once—but only *this once*. Do you understand ?”

The child sobbed some inarticulate reply, and did as he was ordered ; so utterly miserable, that no threats had power to add to his distress ; but scarcely had the door closed upon him, before little Reginald, who had hitherto stood still, half frightened and bewil-

dered by this sudden catastrophe, stole to his father's side, entreating :—

“Don't be angry with Arthur, dear papa. He did not mean to be naughty, and I don't think that he really is a coward. But the dogs surprised him, for he did not hear them coming.”

Mr. Wilton's stern expression softened as he looked down upon the fair, earnest, up-turned face; and he stroked Reginald's bright curls, as he answered quietly :—

“*You* are a good boy; it is kind of you to plead for him; but if he behaves thus, he deserves some punishment; and I wish him to feel that I am seriously displeased.”

“But *do* forgive him. Only this once. Tell him that you do,” persisted Reginald.

“Nonsense, my dear child. Leave him to himself.”

Reginald's eyes filled with tears, and he drew back a little, but still seemed unwilling to give up the point. His mother now came forward to his assistance, and laying her hand

gently upon her husband's arm, said in her most persuasive tone:—

“Yes; don't be hard upon him. He is never strong, and you do not know how dreadfully he feels the slightest harshness.”

Mr. Wilton looked impatient, and repeated:

“Nonsense! He is a contemptible little coward. Let him suffer for it; it will do him good.”

“He *will* suffer for it, in a way you do not guess,” said Alice, with increasing boldness.

“He will suffer both in mind and body; for he is the most sensitive child I ever saw.”

“Pshaw! he is obstinate and cowardly, and that is all. My dear Alice, you do him no kindness by this ill-judged way of taking his part. You make him think he is a perfect martyr; whereas he wants hardening, and teaching to show a more manly spirit. Reginald never gives way to such folly, and why should he?”

“Because, as I have said before, they are so differently constituted. Arthur's nerves

are weak, and cannot stand the slightest shock."

"That shows that they want bracing. But, since you desire it, Reginald may call him back; though I will have him to know that this is the last time I shall ever overlook such conduct."

Reginald looked up gratefully, and prepared to fly in search of his brother; but Mrs. Wilton detained him, saying:

"Let *me* go, love. *You* stay here with papa."

"Why is this?" asked Mr. Wilton, sternly.

"I will tell you afterwards. *Do* let me have my own way," pleaded his wife, escaping before he had time to prevent her doing so; because she guessed that Arthur would not readily consent to be led back into his father's presence.

She had judged rightly, for it was no easy matter to persuade him to venture, especially in the condition that she found him in; for he was overwhelmed with shame, and already ex-

hausted with crying; but at length he yielded to her representations, and once more stood before his father, a pitiable little object, with pale cheeks, and downcast eyes.

Even Mr. Wilton felt some slight compassion,—though verging towards contempt,—mingling with his anger; and some secret voice whispered that it would be cruel and ungenerous to oppress still further anything so weak and timid; he therefore contented himself with gravely admonishing him, and bestowing, what was intended for forgiveness, but which sounded far more like a reprimand.

“Arthur, I am glad to see you are ashamed, and I hope this will prove a warning to you for the future. Mind you are upon your guard another time; and never—*never* let me see a repetition of such cowardly behaviour, for there is nothing that I hate and despise more, and I am determined to cure you of it at any cost. Now go; you are forgiven for this once.”

Arthur murmured something about being

“very sorry,” and once more departed, Reginald following to console him, but finding all his efforts futile; for his brother was so cast down by shame and sorrow that he was quite worn out and ill from the very force of his emotions; nor did he recover from them before several days had passed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

There are, I see, who listen to my lay :
Who wretched sigh for virtue, but despair ;
'All may be done,' methinks I hear them say,
'Even death despised by generous actions fair.'
THOMSON'S CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

SCENES, painful as the one described above, were but too frequent ; but at length Mrs. Wilton's influence with her husband prevailed sufficiently to induce him to leave Arthur almost entirely to *her* guidance ; and when left to her management, she always found him gentle and obedient. His father's treatment, on the contrary, was calculated partly to break his spirit, and partly to arouse a violent spirit of resistance to oppression ; for Arthur was na-

turally as proud as he was sensitive, and could not endure the slightest shade of degradation. His was one of those characters which may be easily *led*, but never can be *driven* to do anything by force. He required encouragement; and a few words of judicious praise had far more weight than the severest blame; for while the latter always induced the belief that it was of no use trying to do better, for his case was hopeless, the former raised his spirits, and gave him strength to persevere; an approving smile from his mother (for Alice was worthy of that sacred name), always proving more than a reward for his utmost efforts.

Mr. Wilton now contented himself with taking but little notice of his elder son,—beyond an occasional glance of cold contempt, or a few fervent words of commendation, addressed pointedly to Reginald in his brother's presence. And yet he did not mean to be determinedly unkind and harsh to Arthur; and could he but have known the terrible effect

caused by his marked displeasure, he would probably have assumed a less repellant manner. But his own disposition and his son's were so totally different in all respects, that he could not make allowance for faults and weaknesses beyond his comprehension; nor guess that instead of curing them, as he desired, this line of conduct only made them take still deeper root.

Arthur was remarkably intelligent and thoughtful; eager to learn, and disclosing occasional flashes of genius, which Mrs. Wilton carefully encouraged; but which her husband never even discovered, so carefully were they repressed when he was present. The faintest shadow of ridicule was quite enough to drive back into shyness and silence, so determined, that they might almost have been mistaken for profound stupidity, this unfortunate boy; who, ever suspicious that he was despised and laughed at, never dared to give his imagination play, or to confess his thoughts and feel-

ings to any other person than his mother and his little brother,—the latter of whom could comprehend them but imperfectly.

Yet Arthur admired his father, almost as much as he feared him, and always listened attentively to all he said ; for Mr. Wilton was a man of cultivation and refinement, and (when it suited him), a most agreeable person in society. Arthur often longed to question him on matters of interest, but never dared,—so unconquerable was his dread of a repulse ; and he was therefore compelled to satisfy himself with such stray crumbs of knowledge and amusement, as fell unheeded towards him from the feast prepared for others ; and with hoping that, as he grew older, if he did his best to merit such a reward, these hard conditions might at length be altered. But he far more frequently despaired, than hoped.

For two more years Mrs. Wilton undertook the sole charge of his and Reginald's education ; then a tutor was engaged, with whom they made considerable progress, both pos-

possessing more than average abilities ; but when Arthur was twelve and his brother nearly ten years old, Mr. Wilton decided upon sending them both to a private school which had been highly recommended ; with the view of removing them afterwards to a public one.

The change proved pleasant, and especially to Arthur ; for he found himself kindly treated, and under the care of a man of sense and talent, who appreciated the intelligence of his pupil, and afforded him that encouragement, which his father, with less judgment, had withheld. Reginald was of course a favourite, as he was wherever he appeared ; and the companionship of other boys gave him far more pleasure than it could bestow upon his more retiring elder brother. But, altogether, each was satisfied with their new mode of life. Nearly two years had thus passed away, and Arthur had grown tall, but not much stronger, whilst Reginald seemed daily to become more vigorous and fearless, when, one bright holiday afternoon, the two boys strolled together

through some meadows. They went on, happily and leisurely, discussing boyish hopes and boyish plans, until Arthur paused, exclaiming: "Let us rest a little; it may seem ridiculous, but I am already rather tired. How I wish—Oh, Reginald, you don't know *how* I wish that I were strong!"

He flung himself down upon the grass, looking as though the mild spring weather only made him languid,—as it always did. Reginald followed his example, saying—

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about that. I daresay that you will be stronger some day; and, if not, you must take it easy. It is a good thing that you will not be obliged to work. And just now, this sort of laziness is very pleasant."

"All things seem pleasant to you, Reginald," was the dejected answer. "*You* can enjoy yourself."

"Yes, thoroughly; can't you?"

"Not often" (with a sigh); "I wish I could."

“And so do I; but, Arthur, you like reading and drawing, and all those sort of quiet things.”

“Because,” said Arthur, bitterly, “I am not fit for anything more active. But I envy you, and anybody who has strength and courage.”

The last words being uttered in a low, despairing tone. Reginald answered, kindly :

“Poor fellow ! But I don’t believe you are deficient. Wait till you are tried.”

“My father thinks otherwise, and—don’t betray me, Reginald—but I myself have doubts upon the subject; and they often seem to drive me nearly mad. I try to be brave; but when things come upon me suddenly, they frighten me, just as they did when I was a child.”

“My mother says your nerves are rather shaky, but that comes from ill-health. That is all.”

“I don’t know, or care, about the cause,” cried Arthur, vehemently; “but this I do

know, that it seems unmanly ; and I hate to think that people ridicule my weakness. I could kill anybody, if they only smiled. The other day, when I refused to leap the brook, you heard Haynes—”

“ Yes ; it was a shame. But, Arthur, it was nonsense making such a scene.”

“ So it seems to *you*, because you cannot *feel* what *I* feel. *You* can do anything you please ; and are therefore never subjected to insults, such as I must either submit to, or put down. I knew I *could not* do it, or I would have done it at once ; but if I *had* tried, and failed, I don’t know what would have been the end.”

“ I see. But never mind, dear old fellow. *I’ll* fight your battles, if they only dare to say a word.”

These words, intended to soothe, seemed only to irritate poor Arthur more and more.

“ *You!* my younger brother ! That would stop their laughing, truly ! No ! I must either stand up for myself, or let it pass—as

in all probability this cursed weakness will oblige me to do !”

“ Oh ! Arthur, don’t talk so ! It’s wrong,” said Reginald.

“ I know that ; but I can’t help it,” answered Arthur, colouring. “ It seems such wretched, hopeless work. If I could do *anything*, I should not care.”

“ What sort of things ?”

“ To show I was not quite such a coward as they think. I should like to do some of the things that we read about in ancient history.”

“ Put your hand in the fire, like Mutius,” answered Reginald, half-jestingly : “ and hold it there, to shew you were not afraid of pain ?”

“ Yes ; I often think of that. I should not care about the torture, if—”

“ If people only thought the more of you ! A very grand idea ; but I—poor coward that I am—don’t share it. What is the use of maiming yourself for life, unless you have

some good reason for so doing?" Arthur made no answer. "In *my* opinion," continued Reginald, "it would simply be acting like a fool—(I don't mean any thing personal, so don't be angry). But I don't see the good of crippling yourself, when there is no occasion for such a sacrifice. Time enough, when you are called upon to do so; for instance, if a house should be on fire, or anything of that sort, *then*, of course, it would be one's *duty*; but if not, I'd rather keep my hands as they are now."

Reginald threw himself back upon the grass as he concluded, as if he thought no more could be advanced on his side of the question; and it seemed that Arthur thought so too, for after a moment's pause, he answered:—

"I believe you are right, and I was talking like a fool."

"Nay, not a fool; but rather madly, certainly."

"You, yourself said that any one who did so would be *acting* like one."

“So they would ; but one might think a hundred strange things on the impulse of the moment, without being crazy enough to do them when the time arrived.”

“And so,” sighed Arthur, resuming his former train of thought ; “there is not one earthly thing that I *can* do.”

“You must be patient. Only wait a little.”

“I *have* waited and waited, until I am fairly tired ; and so it will be till the end of my life.”

Reginald could not at once think of any appropriate answer, and was therefore silent, searching his mind for something consolatory ; but he had not yet found it, when a shout from some of his school-fellows changed the current of his thoughts.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RUINED CASTLE.

Yet the meek lover of the lyre
Nursed one brave spark of noble fire ;

* * * *

Not his the nerves that could sustain,
Unshaken, danger, toil, and pain ;
But when that spark blazed forth to flame,
He rose superior to his frame.

SCOTT'S ROKEBY.

ARTHUR was vexed at being thus disturbed, and still more so when two or three of his comrades came up with the intention of carrying Reginald away. The latter, at first resisted their persuasions, but a healthy love of action, and the project of a sham attack upon a neighbouring ruin, garrisoned by an equal number of defenders, proved such strong

temptations, that he soon began to yield, though with signs of compunction for deserting his brother.

"Will you come too; if not to join us, at least to see the fun?" he asked.

"No thank you," answered Arthur, hastily: "I shall do very well here by myself."

"Come along then. We are losing time," exclaimed a boy called Frazer, seizing Reginald by the arm.

Reginald, however, lingered; until Arthur, dreading some jeering remark, said almost angrily:—

"I wish you'd go and leave me. You know very well I like to be alone."

Reginald looked at him reproachfully, but went without more waste of words; and as Arthur looked wistfully after his brother, his heart smote him for the unkindness of his speech. Because he was miserable, was he to be unreasonable and unjust, and above all, to Reginald, who always treated him with such consideration? Arthur was

conscious of his own irritability of temper, and it was so humiliating to think that he could not control it, even when the most trivial annoyances arose, that he shed bitter, scalding tears;—tears which aggravated, instead of relieving his sufferings. But at length, brushing them impatiently away:—

“Pshaw!” he exclaimed, “I am acting like a girl, or rather like a fool, now. I do well to think of emulating ancient heroes, when I give way on every occasion to the meanest passions. Is not fortitude as grand as active courage?”

Struggling bravely with himself, he again began to watch the retreating forms of Reginald and his companions, and at length, slowly rising, he began to follow. But he was still careful to keep at a considerable distance; for the spirits of the latter were far too boisterous to suit his present state of mind.

Traversing the extensive meadow, and crossing a stile, he gained a tract of broken

ground, descending precipitously on one side to a narrow brook ; and upon the top of this bank lay the scene of action—the old ruins.

Arthur had often sat amongst those crumbling walls ; watching the ivy glance and quiver in the sunshine, and the wall-flowers which sprung from every crevice, bend before the wind ; dreaming of, and longing to recall the long vanished days of chivalry. The brook, rippling onwards over its bed of pebbles, and the hum of bees, hovering over the wild thyme and harebells, which sprung freely (like hardy mountain children,) from that stony ground, at once lulled his senses, and seemed to murmur wondrous stories of that olden time. Visions of knights and maidens ; of gay tournaments, and songs sung tenderly in ladye's bower ; of the rush of battle, waving plumes and standards, armour flashing, blows rained down like hail ; of the assault of stately castles, vows taken upon bended knees, far pilgrimages, life lost, glory perilled, honour won ;—these, and various similar imagin-

ings, beguiled the long hours of many a summer afternoon ; disturbed only by the occasional thought,—suggested, as it seemed, by some malicious imp, who grudged him even such unreal happiness :

“ I would bring back those stirring times ! Yet wherefore ? Because they were grander, nobler, than the present ? O they *were* ! But for that very reason, *I*, weak, miserable being that I am, should have had no part in them. Days, when strength, valour, lofty purpose, carried all before them, and men fought their way to fame, were not for such as I ! There is no comfort anywhere, if I would play an active part in the world,—instead of contenting myself with idle dreams.”

But now the ripple of the brook, and the low soft voices of the spring, were lost in joyous laughter, and the clear, ringing tones of thoughtless boys. It was always rather annoying to Arthur to see his school-fellows thus merrily enjoying themselves amongst the fragments of that ruined castle, and he wished

that they could have contented themselves with some less interesting locality ; for *there*, in a spot which he held almost sacred, there sports and high-pitched voices seemed a desecration.

And yet, on the present occasion, feelings, nearly approaching to envy, were awakened, by the sight of those sports, and the sound of voices whose gaiety seemed to spring from thorough light-heartedness ; and which, from the force of contrast, affected Arthur very painfully ; so strong, so self-reliant, so careless of the future, and so full of the enjoyment of mere *existence*, did those boys appear ; whilst he, conscious of powers which few (if any) of them possessed, feeling himself stirred by noble aspirations, burning to achieve distinction, was yet rendered miserable, and doomed to be despised by them, from circumstances utterly beyond his control.

It was a humiliating reflection, and added to the bodily exhaustion from which he was already suffering ; insomuch that, pale, weary,

and dejected, he was glad to stretch himself once more beneath a tree, gasping for breath, and suffering his darker mood to gain the victory. Yet he was almost too tired to follow any connected train of thought; a nightmare oppression, a vague loathing of himself, of life, of everyone, and everything, seizing upon him unresistingly; and for the moment, obliterating every softer and less selfish feeling.

Meanwhile, the mimic siege was vigorously carried on; the words: "up drawbridge; down portcullis!" giving warning that the defenders of the castle were prepared for their assailants. Then the latter pressed on; Reginald's clear voice being distinguishable from the rest, as he cried cheerily: "St. George! St. George! Now, comrades! who will win and wear the golden spurs?"

These, and similar exclamations, jarred discordantly on Arthur's ears; but his eyes absently followed the quick movements of the figures flying to and fro amidst the ruins, with-

out conveying any tangible impression to his mind, when all at once the cry was raised :

“They will not capitulate ! Let us spring a mine, and enter at the breach ?”

A bustle ensued, then a momentary silence, broken by an explosion—as it seemed, of gunpowder ; and next, cries of real dismay, a crash of falling stones, and a wild hurrying hither and thither of the boys. In fact, Haynes had, unknown to any of his comrades, purchased and conveyed there, a small quantity of that dangerous commodity, which he had suddenly fired,—producing effects alike unexpected by himself, as by the rest.

Arthur, suddenly startled from oppressive thoughts, to a sense of some dread reality,—all the more appalling, that its nature was as yet not fully known, sprang to his feet as actively as any of the young combatants would have done ; and occupied solely by one idea, rushed forward to the scene of the catastrophe.

“Reginald! Where are you? What has happened?” was his cry.

But, by the time he arrived there, the confusion had increased. A universal panic prevailed; and most of the boys,—with the selfishness common to all ordinary human beings,—thought only of their own personal safety, which they endeavoured to secure, by flying as speedily as possible to a distance. It is needless to say that Reginald was not among the fugitives, as his brother ascertained by a hasty glance; but where *was* he? was the question. And in what condition?

Arthur, so timid upon most occasions, now, forgetting himself in anxiety about one so dear to him, felt neither fear nor weakness; only a desire to find and rescue Reginald; or if that might not be, at least to share his fate. Strength, proportioned to the emergency, seemed suddenly bestowed, and a rapid thought of home,—the mother, and her anguish, if anything should happen to her only child,—impelled him to fly *towards*, instead of *from*

that fated spot. But again his search was fruitless, and he called on Reginald in vain.

Reginald was safe, however; and the panic almost groundless; for Haynes, who had caused it, was the only sufferer; nor was he seriously hurt, though scorched, shaken, and deadfully alarmed. Fortunately, the powder of which he had obtained possession, was too small in quantity to effect much mischief, beyond displacing a few stones, and blackening the face of him who so recklessly had fired the train.

Some of the powder had entered his eyes, and for some time it was doubtful whether his sight was likely to be permanently injured; but an interview with a doctor, later in the day, in a great measure dispelled that apprehension. But at the moment when Arthur appeared upon the scene, it was just at its height; and Reginald, kneeling behind an angle of the wall, was endeavouring to reassure, and persuade his luckless companion to let him ex-

amine into the extent of the danger. Haynes, bold enough, and ready to taunt others with want of spirit, when his personal security was not imperiled, proved, when in pain, so full of selfish fears, and so unwilling to let anybody touch him, that between his lamentations, and Reginald's remonstrances, Arthur's cries were quite unheeded; and the latter, after pausing for an instant to collect his forces, again rushed onwards with all the energy of desperation. There was one tower left in a state of higher preservation than the rest of the ruins, to the summit of which, wound a staircase,—far from perfect,—but sufficiently so to afford safe footing when ascended cautiously; as he knew by old experience. It now seemed to him that his brother must be somewhere in or upon that tower;—perhaps buried under heaps of rubbish, or prevented from emerging by the outlets being blocked up. As this probability suggested itself, Arthur's hopes revived, and he hurried towards it with more spirit; no tangible danger appearing half so terrible, as

one whose vagueness left him merely powerless.

The arched doorway was unobstructed, and he passed through it, and up the worn and winding stairs; his blind anxiety to discover Reginald, leading him to omit those precautions, which, in general, he was so careful to observe. Yet still, let him exert himself as he would, his quest was unattended by success. Wild with the terror which every moment seized more forcibly upon his imagination, he gained the summit of the tower; and regardless of the dilapidated state of its crumbling battlements, approached them, and leaning over, cast a despairing glance around. The stones gave way: and suddenly awakening to his imminent danger, he instinctively grasped at the ivy for support. But the treacherous stems yielded, though they broke his fall; and sliding downwards with a heap of powdered fragments, he descended to the bottom of the bank on which the ruin stood.

The boys who first fled from the scene of

peril had by this given the alarm, and in a short time, help was near; those who came to the rescue, finding Reginald seated close beside the brook, with his brother's head upon his knee; chafing the cold hands, gazing fearfully upon the closed eyes and pallid face, and calling wildly for assistance.

“ Ah, he is not dead! He cannot be!” was all that the poor boy could say when they arrived.

The head master himself was foremost in the search; and when his eyes fell, first upon the terrified countenance of the younger brother, and next upon the still features of the elder one, who lay there motionless, his forehead stained with blood, all sternness of expression yielded to the deepest anxiety and compassion. He bent down, and carefully raised Arthur's fragile form; the thin white fingers slipping lifelessly away from Reginald's hold, and the head resting heavily against the good preceptor's breast; as the latter, clasping his arms round him, strove to discover whether that

heart which lately throbbed so wildly, was now stilled for ever ; for so his first hurried scrutiny suggested.

A few moments of agonising suspense ensued ; but after one or two remedies had been applied, the faintness which had seized upon Arthur seemed to yield before their influence, and an almost imperceptible pulsation was discovered. He sighed, and opening his eyes, looked around him with a wandering expression.

“Thank God !” exclaimed the master, fervently ; then turning to Reginald : “You see,” he added, “it is as I told you. Your brother will be better soon.”

Reginald gazed at the speaker with a countenance so blank and ghastly, that it was easy to perceive that he was almost stupified with grief and terror ; so new was it to him to be amidst his thoughtless gaiety, thus brought as it were, face to face with death.

“Go home,” were the next words that fell upon his ear. “We shall follow you imme-

diately; and there is nothing more that you can do."

But this order roused him from his apathy; and he clung to Arthur; exclaiming passionately:

"Let me stay. I cannot,—dare not leave him. Only tell me if he is dangerously hurt."

Mr. Longford would have repeated his commands more sternly, had there not been something so touching in Reginald's pleading look and tone, that he could not, from very pity, send him from his brother's side. He gazed at him with a kind, compassionate expression; saying:

"Stay then, if you will. But, my dear boy, do not be down-hearted. We cannot tell yet how it is with him; but you must hope the best,—and I trust that all may still be well."

Reginald was still regarding him, as though endeavouring to understand the meaning of these words; when the attention of both

master and pupil was suddenly arrested by the sound of Arthur's voice.

"Where am I?" he asked faintly. "Where is Reginald? I thought," (struggling to raise himself), "that something terrible had happened. Is he—?"

"I am here, dear Arthur. Quite safe," answered Reginald, throwing himself upon his knees beside his brother. "But you must not speak."

"No; ask no questions. Everyone is safe," said Mr. Longford. "Only tell me whether you are in much pain; and then be quiet whilst we take you home."

"Pain?" echoed Arthur. "No, not much, only I don't feel much inclined to move. But what has happened?—Oh, I remember now! I was searching for Reginald, and fell down from the tower. I thought he was in danger; and resolved, if he died, to die with him. I am glad he is not hurt."

This was too much for Reginald. He trembled violently, and covering his face, broke

forth into a passionate, uncontrollable fit of weeping. It was vain to reason with him, for his powers of self-control were gone; and all that could be done, was to soothe, and lead him to a distance from his brother. And thus the two boys, who had set out so happily upon their holiday excursion, were conveyed back again; Arthur carried, Reginald led homewards; and the whole house filled with terror and dismay.

But upon examination, it was satisfactorily proved that Arthur had sustained no dangerous injuries,—had no limbs broken: though he was much bruised and shaken. Yet an illness was inevitable, considering the pain and excitement which he, so naturally delicate, had undergone; and everyone who knew him thought that though his life was spared, it was more than doubtful whether his weak constitution would ever recover from so severe a shock.

These ill tidings swiftly found their way home, and Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, setting out

as soon as Mr. Longford's letter reached them, found him suffering from a serious fever, and so weak and excitable that he was scarcely allowed to speak. His spirits had been very low before they came; but at the first glimpse of his mother's gentle, anxious face, his brightened: and he hid it upon her bosom, sobbing. And the kindness, which his father, who had heard his story, showed towards him, both in words and manner, far more than repaid him for all that he had undergone: even though there was much danger of his being slightly lame for life.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCORDANT ELEMENTS.

Vain were a father's hope to see
Aught that beseems a man in thee.
Thou, when thine arm should bend the bow,
And hurl the dart, and curb the steed,
Thou, Greek in soul, if not in creed,
Must pore where babbling waters flow,
And watch unfolding roses blow.
Would that yon orb, whose matin glow
Thy listless eyes so much admire,
Would lend thee something of his fire!
BYRON'S BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

ARTHUR was taken home as soon as he was well enough to be removed, and there nursed by his step-mother with the utmost tenderness. She read to him: she brought him flowers and drawings to beguile the weary hours of languor and illness; she studied his

lightest fancies ; thinking no time or trouble wasted, which could afford him even a few moments' gratification. And her kindness and care were not thrown away, for he loved and revered her with all his heart.

His father also treated him with unwonted kindness and consideration ; being apparently very anxious about him, and desirous that he should be made as happy and comfortable as circumstances would permit. He spoke to him gently, and if he heard that Arthur had expressed a wish for anything, took pains to have that wish immediately gratified :—perhaps, because he thought that their past relations had not been so satisfactory as could have been desired, and was anxious in some measure to make atonement.

Arthur was not slow to perceive the change ; and could he have dared to flatter himself that it sprang from a proportionate increase of affection, he would have indeed been very happy. But it seemed rather to his sensitive mind, that Mr. Wilton's solicitude was born,

not of love, but of pity,—and pity is said to be nearly akin to contempt! This destroyer of all chance of new contentment, made him still shrink from expressing what he really felt; and caused all intercourse with his father to be marked by nearly as much constraint as formerly.

Mr. Wilton perceived this with keen annoyance: for he could not understand how difficult it was to break through old established habits and feelings, and he had not patience to work out a gradual change.

“It is useless; I have done everything I can,” he would say, “and yet he has not the slightest confidence in me. There is no openness about that boy: whereas, Reginald would tell me everything.”

“Because he has been encouraged: made to feel that *he* might speak freely upon all occasions,” answered Mrs. Wilton: “whilst poor Arthur—has learned to be afraid: the most difficult lesson to be unlearned again!”

“Exactly. That is just what I complain

of,—that he is afraid. He is more of a Kennedy than a Wilton : timid, suspicious, underhand !”

“Oh, Arnold, indeed you do him injustice. Arthur only wants encouragement to disclose many nobler qualities than you give him credit for.”

“Well, I will not contradict you,—but I wish he would be quick in making the disclosure, for I am tired of wondering what he really thinks of me. Of course I am as sorry for him as it is possible to be, for he seems to wear out, not only my patience, but his own strength with this sort of nonsense ; and you know it is my desire that nothing should be neglected which could in any way add to his comfort or satisfaction.”

“Ah !” thought Mrs. Wilton, with a sigh, “how easy it is to *speak* of bestowing comfort and contentment on such terms ; but how very difficult to *achieve* ! I fear that a good understanding never will be established *there* ; and without it, all the benefits with which his

father loads poor Arthur, will only add to the burden which is almost too heavy for him already. One word, spoken affectionately as he speaks to Reginald, would be worth them all; but for *that*, I fear his brother may long pine in vain."

As it seemed, however, useless to say more upon the subject to her husband, she was obliged to content herself with doing all that *she* could to supply his deficiencies, and to conceal them from the ever-watchful Arthur; but the sensitive spirit of the latter was not to be so easily lulled to sleep, though for her sake he often tried to appear blind to slights which rendered him miserable beyond expression.

When Reginald came home for the holidays, the warmth of *his* reception, made Arthur feel more than ever that they never could be looked upon in the same light; and that though he might be borne with—even treated with consideration, it was only a concession to his state of bodily and mental weakness;

and from that time, he quietly despaired. He fancied himself inferior to Reginald in all respects; yet still he clung to his brother, instead of feeling jealousy; this being the greatest comfort to their mother, who continued to enforce, both by precept and example, the noble doctrines of love, unselfishness, and confidence in God.

Reginald had been at home about a week, during which period Arthur had seemed much improved in health and spirits, when one of those trifling annoyances, which were for ever throwing him back into his former state of weakness and depression, once more occurred to make him miserable.

He had been ordered to ride, but dared only trust himself upon the quietest pony; and upon this occasion was returning from one of these unexciting expeditions, with his brother walking beside him, chatting pleasantly; when Mr. Wilton, who was also going towards the house, paused unperceived, to watch and make his comments on the two.

He saw his elder son dismount cautiously, languidly, and with an air of evident relief; and his countenance assumed an expression of contempt, as the boy feebly ascended the few steps which led to the entrance-hall; his lameness giving him a slow, uncertain gait; whilst Reginald, springing lightly upon the pony, rode off all enjoyment; and, as though it were impossible to go to the stables by the more orthodox route, made a circuit for the pleasure of leaping some low rails.

“Bravo!” cried Mr. Wilton, half involuntarily; “at least, I see some traces of manly spirit *there*! Oh! Arthur,” he added, carelessly, “I did not see *you*; I thought you were gone in. You seem tired. Had you not better go and rest a little?”

These words, intended to be kind, only added to the poor boy's wretchedness; for he had seen his father's looks and heard his words; drawing from them an inference far from complimentary to himself. His heart was almost bursting with shame and vexa-

tion; and he could only answer, without raising his eyes :—

“ Yes; I am just going.”

Then he went, to yield in solitude to the bitterest feelings; in which, a sense of his own deficiencies and sufferings, formed a chief ingredient. To be out of sight, forgotten, and alone, appeared all that remained for him, since his slightest actions only inspired contempt; and he was still sitting with folded arms, unoccupied, and with an air of the gloomiest despondency, when Reginald entered, full of life and spirits. The latter paused at the door, surprised by this sudden change, for his brother had seemed unusually cheerful whilst they were out; yet these variable moods were matters of such everyday occurrence, that he had no difficulty in guessing *why* Arthur looked so dismal.

“ What is the matter ?” he exclaimed; then, receiving no immediate answer, he came forward with an air of real concern. “ Why, Arthur, what has happened—what *can* have

happened, in these few minutes, to annoy you?"

"Nothing," was the brief reply.

"Nothing! I cannot believe that. I feel sure—"

"And I assure you, that nothing unusual has occurred," said Arthur, coldly. "I have not seen anyone, except my father, for a moment; and he merely remarked that I seemed tired, and asked whether I had not better go and rest; so pray set your mind at ease."

"Then is it," (doubtfully), "that you are only tired?"

"Perhaps. I am generally pretty weary when I attempt to do anything, except sit still; weary in mind and body! I will lie down quietly, and read a little."

As Arthur spoke, he flung himself upon a sofa, and took up a book, with the air of one who had no taste for further questioning. Rêginald stood looking at him for a moment; but then, sighing, he seated himself with a

hopeless expression, and appeared as if he also intended to read.

"The 'Betrothed,' " he said, looking at the title of the volume in his hand, and speaking to change the current of his brother's thoughts. "You are reading this? Does it seem interesting?"

"Of course. Sir Walter Scott's works always are; but I advise you to try it. I am in the second volume."

"Well, but do tell me what the story is about. I see that it is at the time of the Crusades."

"Yes; it is full of stirring adventures; therefore you are sure to like it," answered Arthur, still with the same listless air.

Reginald, however, would not yet give in.

"Do I bore you with my questions?"

"N—no."

"Then—if you are not too tired—I wish you would just give me an outline of the principal events. I like books all the better

for having a general idea what I am going to read about. *You* like it, as far as you have read?"

"Oh! yes. As well as I like anything; but no books have power to fix my attention long."

"Why, how is that? You used to seem so fond of reading?"

"I am sure I don't know.—But you want to hear about it?"

"If you'll take the trouble."

"Oh! yes. I have no objection to give you a slight sketch of the chief incidents," said Arthur. "I may as well do that as any thing else."

And he forthwith commenced; rather drily at first, but gradually warming to the subject; Reginald listening most attentively.

"You are right; it is the sort of story I should like."

"And there is a ghost, too," added Arthur. "The Red-finger."

"All the better. A touch of the superna-

tural will make it all the more exciting. But who sees this ghost? And in what form does it appear?"

"In that of a beautiful young lady, who had been basely murdered. But I will not tell you any more about her; it would take away half the interest."

"Oh! very well. I'll set to work at once, then. A young lady! Something like the story of our own haunted chamber."

"I was struck by the resemblance; but, Reginald, do you believe in spirits?"

"How believe in them?"

"That they have the power to return, and haunt the places where they met with violence?"

"I am not certain," was the doubtful answer. "But I do not think it is improbable."

"Nor I," said Arthur; looking however, as if he had hoped to hear a contrary opinion. "I have often thought about it; and it seems to me that there is no reason why we should disbelieve in apparitions."

“Better not to think too much about it, for it only makes one nervous; and *I* do not believe that they would be allowed to appear without good reason. For instance, what should bring them back to this earth, for the mere purpose of frightening you or me? *That* does not seem at all likely, and I do not think that it would be permitted; therefore I don’t feel much afraid of ghosts.”

“You are wise,—if you can help the feeling.”

“Why, are you—”

“Not *frightened*, as you express it; but uneasy, when I am alone in places where such beings are supposed to appear. I try to shake off the feeling; but it will creep over me, until, through the darkness, I fancy that I see dim shadows flitting. I know that it is merely a piece of cowardly weakness,—like everything else that I think or do,—and yet, I cannot help it; for the more I endeavour to reason with myself, the more powerfully do such fan-

cies seize upon me. But I mean to overcome them before I have done."

"Better to turn your thoughts to something else, and rest satisfied that so long as you do no wrong, nothing need cause you terror or alarm."

"I quite agree with you. Why should it? But, Reginald, how should you like to pass a whole night in the haunted room alone?"

"Not at all," was the unhesitating reply. "That is, unless there was any particular occasion for doing so. Of course, if I thought it was my *duty*, that would make all the difference; but otherwise, I would rather not try the experiment. I should be sure to feel exceedingly uncomfortable; for that room is not cheerful by night—so far away from every one."

"Cheerful!" exclaimed Arthur, smiling; yet with a shudder. "No, I cannot say that it is; but still—"

He paused, as if unwilling to say more

upon the subject; but his brother asked quickly :

“ Would *you* like to dare the adventure ? ”

“ No ; I am sure I should not *like* it. ”

“ Then would you *do* it, without liking it ? ”

“ *That* remains to be proved, ” was the answer ; and Arthur, walking to the window, fell into a fit of meditation, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.

BER.—How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale;
Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you of it?

HOR.—Before my God, I might not this believe,
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes.

HAMLET.

REGINALD soon forgot all about their discussion, in the interest excited by the Welsh chief and his exploits, mentioned in the opening chapters of the "Betrothed." His mind was in far too fresh and healthy a condition to dwell upon those mysterious subjects, amidst which his brother lingered with a kind of morbid pleasure, nor could he guess that Arthur was even then engaged in planning a

secret enterprise, as bold as it was rash. But nevertheless, the latter, bent on overcoming foolish apprehensions, and testing his own powers of endurance; was actually nerving himself for a midnight visit to the haunted chamber.

He was grave and silent all the evening; weighing the matter fully in his mind, and not quite relishing the projected expedition,—especially, as the time drew nearer,—yet resolved not to sink in his own estimation by shrinking from the ordeal. Reginald had said that so long as he did no evil, nothing need alarm him; and he endeavoured to draw comfort from this reflection; as well as from the thought, that once bravely gone through, this undertaking would raise him,—if not in the opinion of others, at least in his own,—by proving that he was not totally devoid of moral courage.

Half-past nine was his usual hour of retiring for the night, and he lay watchfully awake, listening to Reginald's peaceful breathings, as

the latter slept quietly in his small, white-curtained bed, at the opposite side of the apartment till the rest of the household should have also sunk into repose. The time seemed long ; and yet, when the sound of footsteps and closing doors, warned him that all would soon be still, the moments appeared to fly, and the dread hour of trial hastening on with ominous celerity.

Arthur's heart began to beat painfully, his breathing seemed oppressed, and his hands grew cold and damp, although the night was warm. In a few minutes Mrs. Wilton would look in upon them, according to her usual custom ; and afterwards !—He dared not dwell upon that *afterwards*, for fear cowardice should impel him to break his resolution at last.

A light step approached, the door was gently opened, and their mother, shading the light, advanced, noiselessly, towards the two white beds :—towards Reginald's first ; and Arthur watched her as she stood there for an

instant, regarding her sleeping boy with the strongest love and admiration. She bent down and kissed him, murmuring, "God bless you, my own darling!" and then turned away, to look at his elder brother. At first, Arthur feigned to be asleep; but involuntarily his eyes unclosed, to meet those which glanced down at him so tenderly.

"What! not asleep yet? Or did I wake you?" asked the soft voice of Mrs. Wilton.

"Not asleep yet, mother," was the answer.

Mrs. Wilton smoothed his hair, and bending more closely over him, enquired with some anxiety:

"Why is this, love? Are you not comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you; perfectly," said Arthur; unconsciously stating that which was not true; for his self-appointed enterprise had rendered him both bodily and mentally uncomfortable.

"You are sure you don't feel ill?"

"Quite sure, dear mother."

"Nor in want of anything?"

"No,—nothing."

"Then try to sleep, my love. It is so bad for you to lie awake."

"But I cannot help it. I am always very wakeful."

"Ah! my poor child, I wish that it were otherwise. But close your eyes, and do not think of anything exciting." She kissed his brow. "Good night, dear Arthur. God be with you!"

And then the gentle figure, and the light both vanished; noiselessly as they had entered, and except for the moonbeams slanting through the window, all was once more gloom.

"Yes, God be with me!" thought Arthur, raising himself to look around, "my mother's blessing ought to be a safeguard and endow me with new courage. But it is not time yet; I must wait a little longer."

He sank back upon his pillow, and clasping his hands, prayed for strength, protection,

guidance, as though his projected undertaking were indeed a solemn duty, as well as an honourable and dangerous venture; such being in reality the view of it taken by his heated imagination; and to flinch from it appearing not only a weakness, but an actual sin.

At length he seemed endowed with new courage, and once more rising, looked fearlessly around the shadowy room; the time had arrived, and he was not afraid. He approached Reginald, and regarded him for a moment with feelings very nearly akin to envy, for the latter lay sleeping with such a quiet happy countenance, as though no vexing anxieties, no doubts, no thoughts, such as had often drawn tears of humiliation and agony from poor Arthur's eyes, when he felt that he might shed them unperceived—had power to trouble his repose. Arthur gazed upon him as we gaze on those from whom we are parting for an indefinite period; danger before us, and regrets behind. Then, stealing towards the door, he turned the lock cautiously (having

first with equal caution partly dressed himself,) and in another moment was standing shivering in the gloomy passage.

How dark it seemed ! how still and lonely ; and yet how full of strange mysterious shadows. Arthur felt a vague horror creeping over him, but it was now too late to give up the adventure ; he must go on and dare those midnight terrors, or fall for ever in his own estimation. Breathing a prayer, and looking neither to the right nor left, he stole onwards, slowly drawing nearer to the door of the gallery which led to the haunted chamber.

He reached the door, and groping in the darkness, turned the lock and entered, the bright moonbeams streaming full across his way. He left the gallery door wide open, saying to himself that it was better not to close it for fear of disturbing the family, but in reality seizing upon such a fair excuse for not cutting off all communication between his destination and the rest of the house.

The room towards which his steps were

bound lay at the furthest extremity of the gallery, and it may be supposed that he was in no great haste to cross the threshold. On the contrary, he lingered; gazing, now backward into the darkness of the outer passage, now at the grim portraits which appeared to frown upon him from the walls, now through the windows out into the calm night, and now straight before him to that doorway, dimly visible in the uncertain light. Half-way he paused to compose his nerves by the reflection: "God is ever present, and ever ready to protect those who do no wrong. He knows that I try to do right, therefore He will watch over me. Why should I fear?"

Strengthened by this thought he pursued his course more boldly, even feeling sufficiently at ease to note the beautiful effect of light and shadow, both amongst the trees and shrubs without, and amidst the pictures and carved work of the gallery. "Some day I shall attempt to sketch it; a spot rendered doubly interesting by association."

He now tried to occupy his mind with meditations upon art, and projects for the future, and thus dispel all nervous thoughts. But when he reached that ominous door, art, philosophy, and even religion, failed to still the wild throbbing of his heart. Yet, now—having advanced so far upon his expedition, he was not to be driven back by superstitious fears. The lock turned beneath his trembling efforts with a sound which echoed through the wide gallery, and through the unfurnished room beyond, into which he now gazed anxiously, as though doubtful whether it were indeed untenanted.

All was quiet; he was looking only into empty space; and once more gaining confidence, he passed the threshold. It was an apartment of moderate dimensions, with a large bay window, through which the moonlight streamed in a flood, across the polished floor, and upon a picture of a knight in armour, which hung exactly opposite. All parts of it were tolerably light; there were no

dark corners, nothing awful, except a door, always kept locked—communicating with a narrow staircase, up which had once stolen the assassins, whose act had made that room a spot to be avoided by the superstitious. An ill-fated lady, young and beautiful, had once inhabited that chamber; her blood had been shed there at the suggestion of a rival, and from it had her lifeless form been dragged.

Arthur was too well acquainted with the story. Often had he dwelt upon the details with mingled grief and horror, and stood (in daylight) gazing around the room where the spirit of the Lady Isabel had been forced by violence from its earthly habitation: and now his eyes fixed themselves intently on that low door-way, as though fascinated by its terrible associations. And even whilst he remained in that observant attitude, the clock of the neighbouring church striking twelve, sent a sudden shudder through his frame. He could have fancied that something flitted past him, that he heard a faint sigh, felt a cool breath

upon his cheek ; and that fatal door, though securely locked, riveted his whole attention.

There was scarcely any wind, yet something seemed to shake it, as if endeavouring to gain an entrance into the room. He remembered that it always shook and rattled, and resolved to turn his eyes and thoughts away from it, seating himself upon the ground, and once more endeavouring to compose his mind. But what subject could occupy it, save the Lady Isabel? He thought of her, her beauty, wrongs, and untimely death, until she almost seemed to glide before him, lovely, though pale, and with dishevelled locks. It would be a long weary watch, for though it was summer, hours must pass before the first faint light of dawn dispelled the terrors of night ; and in such a situation, minutes would seem lengthened into hours. Arthur had not sufficient courage to follow the example of Eveline Beranger, by locking the door through which he had just passed, though he felt shame for his want of resolution ; but to shut himself up

in that remote chamber would have been too much for his powers of endurance, so he left the door ajar, and collecting all his forces, waited patiently for what might follow.

An hour of such suspense that it seemed interminable, wore away ; and again the clock struck, and again he shivered. He was chilled to the heart, and becoming every moment as he grew more faint and weary, more and more susceptible to mysterious impressions. He dared scarcely breathe or move, and his eyes ached and became dim with gazing so fixedly at the ominous door. Once or twice, a shadow passing before the moon, threw the whole apartment into temporary darkness, and sent a sudden thrill through every nerve, as though that fleeting gloom had been caused by the movement of some unearthly being. Yet still he prayed, and reasoned with himself :

“ It was but a cloud ; and if otherwise, why should I fear ? God will protect me. Lord, be near to help me. Give me strength and

manliness, for thou seest my weakness and the secret desires of my heart !”

Such prayers and reflections, endued him at least with fortitude, if not with calmness, and his hot eyes still kept intent watch when nearly another long half hour had passed. Venturing for an instant to withdraw his attention from the chief object of dread,—the dark, low doorway, he turned to the window, with a vague hope that morning would soon break, but, to his disappointment, there were yet no signs of its approach ; no light but that of the pale, awe inspiring moon ; a light beloved by wandering spirits of the night.

Such was the fancy suggested by the sight of its cold, clear rays, and the faint rustle of the trees without ; and as if summoned by the mere knowledge that Arthur’s mind was oppressed by thoughts of such shadowy visitants, whilst he still looked towards the window, a something white and indistinct, actually crossed it on the outside ; pausing a moment to gaze in

upon him, and beat against the panes with a low, wailing cry.

Was the shape a reality, or only a creation of his brain? It was,—if not a tangible reality, at least an object visible, not to imagination, but to sight. His heart bounded violently as though it strove to burst forth from his bosom; he sprang to his feet, and with a cold perspiration standing on his forehead, stood for an instant as if fascinated by terror; for the impression had seized upon him, that the white form which he beheld, was that of a female,—of the unhappy Lady Isabel. It passed onwards whilst his eyes were fixed upon it; but only to return with a still louder wail, and an action as of wringing its hands in despair. Arthur could endure the mysterious figure,—the terrible suspense,—the agony caused by its near vicinity, no longer. It appeared to him upon the point of entering; and overwhelmed by superstitious dread, he uttered a wild shriek, which rang along the whole

gallery, staggered back a few paces, and fell senseless to the floor.

That cry of mortal terror penetrated even as far as Mr. and Mrs. Wilton's room; rousing the latter, who was a light sleeper, and causing her to spring instantly to the ground, and as noiselessly as possible to put on her dressing-gown and slippers. But her movements, light as they were, awoke her husband, and he sat up enquiring :

"Where are you going, Alice? Is anything the matter?"

"I heard something; did not you. It sounded like a cry."

"Oh, nonsense! you are always fancying sounds."

"But this was not fancy; not a dream. It might have been one of the boys calling out in their sleep," said Mrs. Wilton, hastily lighting a candle at the lamp which was burning (according to custom) in their room.

"Do not disturb yourself, Arnold; I am

sorry that I awoke you. Only let me go and see."

"Better stay quiet, and let me," was the rather ungracious answer. "I wonder that you don't take cold with running after all these imaginary noises."

Mrs. Wilton was, however, already at the door.

"Oh, I shall not take cold; and I dare say that it is nothing after all. I know that I am nervous, but I cannot help it," were her parting words; and her husband little guessed how fast her heart was beating with vague apprehension. She *was* nervous, and apt to fidget about the boys; and he therefore thought lightly of her sudden alarm; merely saying, as she left the room, and he sank down again upon his pillow :

"As you please. I recommend you to be quick in your researches, and don't wake poor Reginald." And with this advice he once more dropped asleep.

Mrs. Wilton, meantime, hastened to the boys' apartment, which was close at hand : perceiving that the door, which she had herself closed after leaving it, was now a little open, though within, all was dark and quiet ; Reginald's regular breathings being the only sound which broke the stillness, and testifying that his rest, at least, was calm and undisturbed. His mother drew nearer, and having satisfied herself that he was safe and well, turned to the bed where Arthur ought to have been sleeping ; but now, indeed, her apprehensions seemed too just. He was gone ! But where ? A sudden agony of terror seized upon her ! and she stood, gazing around with looks of consternation.

Her first thought was to wake Reginald, and ask him where his brother was ; her next, to call upon her husband for assistance ; but a moment's reflection convinced her that the former was quite unconscious of Arthur's absence ; and a strong objection to give the

ter any unnecessary alarm, made her pause before appealing to Mr. Wilton.

She shook with fear; a dozen wild fancies passing rapidly through her mind; followed by one which gave her some slight comfort. Arthur was generally restless and excitable. She had known him call aloud, and even rise, and attempt to leave the room in his sleep; and perhaps he might now have wandered away under the influence of a dream. It was possible,—nay, probable; she trusted such might prove to be the case; and saying to herself, that no time must be lost in searching for him, lest he should come to any harm, she left the room as hastily as she had entered.

In her white dressing-gown, and with her pale, anxious looks, she herself moved onward through the darkness like a ghost: her candle burning dimly, and shedding but a faint glimmer upon the obscurity of the wide oak stairs and passages. At any other time she might have felt uneasy as she traversed

that large, gloomy house alone, at such a dismal hour; but when the children's safety was in question, she never cast one thought upon herself, but hurried on, occupied by the one all-absorbing idea.

The gallery door was also open; and a cold air, blowing upon her as she reached it, made her shiver; but she entered boldly, now convinced that Arthur must have passed that way. Shading her candle with her hand, she looked anxiously from side to side as she proceeded: every moment of suspense adding to her fears; but still, all was silent, and no living object met her gaze. A low wind sighed mournfully through the crevices of the windows, as though chanting a sad, mysterious song. She raised her eyes, imploring aid; and thus, alternately moving rapidly forward, and pausing to search each shadowy corner for the missing boy, she at length gained the door of that remote chamber, where stretched upon the moonlit floor, he still lay motionless—insensible.

She darted towards him with an exclamation of mingled thankfulness and dread. He was there, and must have wandered to that spot. But—how was he, now that he was found? Another moment, and her candle was placed upon the ground, and she herself upon her knees beside Arthur, endeavouring to raise him in her arms. His eyes were closed,—his hand cold, and he seemed quite lifeless—he could but be asleep!

“Oh, Arthur! my dear child, speak to me!” she exclaimed. As if her voice had roused him, he sighed and opened his eyes; but the white figure bending over him, inspired fresh terror; he shuddered, and forcing himself from his mother’s hold, covered his face with his hands; and shrinking together, as though with dread of some fearful apparition, faintly gasped forth:

“Spare me! Oh, for Heaven’s sake, have mercy! Oh, my God, protect me!”

“Arthur! My own Arthur!” cried Mrs. Wilton, mistaking this paroxysm of super-

stitious fear for the ravings of delirium ; “ do not be afraid of me,—your mother. You must be dreaming. Look up, and convince yourself that it is me.”

He only shuddered more violently ; but she forcibly drew down his hands, and by dint of explanations and caresses, reassured him in some measure, though no sooner was he convinced that she was no intangible wanderer of the night, but a human being,—and his mother, than, throwing himself into her arms, and clinging tightly to her, whilst he hid his face upon her bosom, he entreated wildly :

“ Take me from this dreadful place ! I dare not stay here, after what has passed.”

“ What *has* passed ? How did you come here ?” she asked, clasping him closely, and still doubting whether he were not raving.

Again a shudder.

“ Do not ask me. Only let us go.”

“ Yes ; you are cold : come back, and let me see you safe in bed. You came here in your sleep, and being suddenly awakened,

were bewildered,—overcome with surprise and fear. It was but natural; but you will feel better after you have slept again,” said Mrs. Wilton, raising and leading him away.

Her arm was round him, nor was such support unnecessary, for he walked with feeble and uncertain steps, as if benumbed by terror, and scarce conscious where he was, or whither he was going. She conducted him back to his room, and saw his head once more laid upon the pillow,—just as it had rested there when she had kissed and blessed him a few hours before. But how changed he was since then! She felt that he was in no state to be left alone; and therefore, having quitted the room for an instant to convince herself that her husband was not anxiously awaiting her, she returned to watch by Arthur till the morning. It was a relief to find that Mr. Wilton was asleep; for she wished thoroughly to investigate this mystery, before speaking to him on the subject; and Arthur was as yet too

much excited to bear any questioning. He would only hold her hand, and say imploringly :

“Mother, don’t leave me. At least, not at present. Is it nearly morning?”

“It will soon be light, my love.”

“Oh, will it? I am very, very thankful ; for this night has been intolerably long, and I began to think it never would be day again.”

Mrs. Wilton went to the window and drew aside the blind.

“See : there is a faint gleam already.”

“Oh, I am so thankful!” answered Arthur, gazing towards it with straining, blood-shot eyes.

“And now try to sleep a little. You will be quite exhausted if you do not.”

“Mother,—I cannot.”

“Close your eyes and try. I wish I had a glass of wine to give you, for your hands are cold as ice. Lie still, whilst I fetch the keys and get some.”

But Arthur only tightened his hold of her, exclaiming :

“ No, no ! Only stay ! ” Then as if ashamed of his vehemence, he added : “ I am sorry you were alarmed on my account, and I—will not do so again. But stay with me a little longer,—and don’t tell my father.”

“ Tell him what, my love ? Were you not walking in your sleep ? ”

Arthur hid his face, before he answered :

“ No ; I was awake. I was following out a settled purpose ; and I have been justly punished for my rash folly.”

More and more uneasy, Mrs. Wilton scarce knew whether to question him further, or avoid the subject. Sleep, he could not, or would not ; and she sat by him, chafing his hands, and keeping watch, until the first faint glimpse of daylight became visible. He sighed, and moved restlessly from side to side ; but finally, when morning dawned, of his own accord he whispered :

“Mother, don’t laugh at me,—and I will tell you what I have seen.”

“Laugh at you, Arthur? Do I ever treat you so?”

“No, no; you are always good and kind. But promise me you will not tell my father!”

“You may be certain that I will not tell him anything to your disadvantage.”

Thus encouraged, Arthur told his tale; shuddering with horror when he spoke about the apparition. But Mrs. Wilton kissed him, saying calmly:

“It was your excited fancy,—or perhaps, the object which you saw was the large white owl which John the gardener told me had taken up its abode in the church-porch. I feel convinced of it; though time and circumstances made you fancy it was something more.”

His mother’s tone was re-assuring, though, as is generally the case in such matters, Arthur

was not easily convinced that he had only seen an owl. He still clung to the belief that the thing which he had seen was supernatural, though he only answered :

“It may be as you imagine. But I acted foolishly.”

“You did indeed, and I trust, dear Arthur, that you never will incur such risks again,—for *my* sake, as well as for your own ; for such an adventure is enough to make you ill.”

“I was very selfish—but I fancied I was doing right. Oh, mother ! I am such a coward ; and the knowledge of it makes me miserable. But forgive me ; and don’t tell anyone—not even Reginald.”

“No ; it is better that he should not know. And, Arthur, it would be wiser to reserve your strength and courage, till you were called upon to exert them. Then, you could but trust in God, and do your best.”

Arthur sighed heavily.

“Ah, I feel that you are right.”

Then, worn out, he slept a little, but his

dreams were painful ; and (as Mrs. Wilton had feared), the illness from which he was only just recovering, once more seized upon him with redoubled force. She kept his secret, however, and nursed him back to comparative tranquillity and health ; though weeks passed by before he regained the ground which he had lost. His nervousness had increased to such a degree that the slightest sound startled him, —especially at night ; and spite of reason and religion, Mrs. Wilton's quiet conversations on the subject, and his own conviction that he *ought* not to believe that he had seen an apparition, or was likely to see others, imagination often gained the victory, and made him far more wretched than before.

But, worst of all, the doctor who had attended him from infancy, gave such a poor report of him, that it was decided all thoughts of a public school must be for ever laid aside, and he must continue his education with a private tutor. A grievous disappointment, for he had set his heart upon it, as the last hope

of gaining manliness and vigour ; not to speak of all the honours which he *might* also have acquired ; and now he must be content to plod on drearily at home,—without companion or encouragement, whilst Reginald won a double share of laurels. Hard destiny : but there was nothing for it but submission.

CHAPTER X.

THE STUDIO.

We wish our names eternally to live;
Wild dream! which ne'er had haunted human thought
Had not our natures been eternal too.

YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

"WHAT are you at work upon now, Arthur? May I look?" asked Reginald, entering the room which his brother had converted into a studio.

"Oh, yes; come and see," was the ready answer; and the two stood side by side before the easel;—the countenance and attitude of each forming in themselves studies worthy of any painter; so full were they of diverse character, and so striking a contrast did the pair produce.

The lower part of the window was entirely darkened, and the morning light shone down upon them from above; touching their hair and faces, and strongly marking the difference of feature and expression. Arthur was now twenty; but slight and delicate as ever, as might have been guessed by the almost transparent paleness of his naturally fair complexion, and by the thin white hand with which he pointed to the canvass. Notwithstanding his lameness, he was remarkably graceful in his movements, and his features were refined and regular; the sun shone upon a head as beautiful as ever was created by ancient sculptor, and on soft curls of dark brown hair,—just tinged with gold where they caught the light. His deep blue eye was mild and melancholy,—except when kindled by the fire of genius, and his whole manner generally full of calm dejection, springing from ill-health and disappointment. Like most people, he cared less for the good gifts which he possessed, than for those which

circumstances had placed utterly beyond his reach;—the pursuits and pleasures of an *active* life, rather than the quiet, yet even more ambitious ones of art. He envied Reginald his vigorous youth, and keen powers of enjoyment; he envied everyone possessed of bodily strength, and the energy which springs therefrom; and the thought that he must always lead a tranquil and retired life, was bitter as any that disturbed his mind. But so it was ordained; and rather than spend his days in idleness, he had chosen to be a painter; though that occupation, instead of soothing, wore and irritated him by the incessant conflict between noble aspirations, and a humiliating sense of failure.

He was gifted with genius; but being of an exacting nature, nothing short of perfection satisfied his requirements; his imagination was vivid; his embodiment of the grand conceptions of his mind often strong and masterly, though seldom capable of satisfying *him*; for, instead of remembering his youth,

and the years of toil and study which *must* be passed before distinction can be gained in any art, and being contented with *progressive* improvement, he vexed and fretted himself because he could not grasp superlative excellence at once.

Reginald, on the contrary, was far too full of warm life and conscious power, to be the slave of fancies such as those which tormented his less-favoured brother; neither had he Arthur's burning ambition. He could admire what was great or charming in the works of others, without any thought of rivalry; appreciating, reverencing *them*, and their glorious talents, rather than dreaming of entering the lists as a competitor for fame; his nature being simple and unselfish, as it was brave and manly—satisfied with doing—and doing *well*—whatever work happened to be placed before him, instead of seeking out difficulties for the glory of overcoming them, or the humiliation of finding his endeavours failures.

Now, as he stood beside his elder brother, (rather taller in stature, and far more powerful), his handsome countenance was alike expressive of good feeling, strong sense, and boyish enjoyment of life; the bright warm morning seeming to have filled his heart with sunshine, which returned to light in the form of kindly words and actions, a happiness which shone forth from his eyes, (blue, like Arthur's, but how different in expression!) and in the careless ease and grace with which he moved. Though scarcely eighteen, he had already attained his full height—nearly six feet—and in manner and appearance appeared a fitting ornament for the profession he had chosen; possessing all those attractive qualities of gallantry, quick perceptions, and playful wit, which a soldier's gay and changeful life is so peculiarly calculated to develope. His face glowed with animation, and his complexion was slightly bronzed by exposure to sun and wind; bearing testimony to the ardour with which he pursued all manly ex-

ercises ; whilst his hair, luxuriant, and tinged with a rich golden light, set off a noble, open brow.

Each was beautiful ; each totally unlike the other in appearance, as in character—save in one or two important points—depth of affection, love of all that is ennobling, and the most delicate sense of honour ; and the seeds of those virtues had been sown in both their hearts, by one whom they united in looking up to with the most implicit love and confidence—their mother.

“ You will scarcely make it out at present. I have only just begun,” said Arthur, permitting his brother to examine the rough sketch upon the easel. “ It is an idea of my own ; but,” (with a sigh), “ I fear I shall not succeed in carrying it out.”

Reginald smiled, as he answered in a tone of encouragement :—

“ How like you ! Beginning to despond already ! If you only started with the conviction that you were certain to succeed, you

would have a far better chance ; but, as it is, your want of confidence destroys your hopes."

"Perhaps so ; yet that very dissatisfaction is the true source of all improvement ; for those who are too well-satisfied with the result of their own efforts, seldom rise beyond mere mediocrity."

"But there is a medium in all things, Arthur, as I try in vain to impress upon you ; and I am convinced that faint heart, not only never won fair lady, but any other prize. To do any good, you *ought* to have a moderate confidence in your own powers, and a strong resolution not to be disheartened."

"It is very well for *you* to say so, but it is *my* nature to despond and feel disheartened," answered Arthur, smiling sadly. "And no wonder ! Every circumstance has tended to confirm those feelings, and to make me what I am—a poor, weak, miserable creature, whose efforts never yet succeeded, and," (sighing deeply), "never will !"

"Nonsense ! It will be your own fault if

they do not. I only wish that I had *half*—a *quarter* of your talent, and I promise you that *I* would turn it to account. Don't smile incredulously ; I am quite in earnest. This slight sketch is bold and spirited. Why should the finished picture be a failure !”

“ Because,” replied Arthur, with passionate vehemence, “ it is my destiny to strive in vain. Grand subjects present themselves to my imagination, and I fancy for a moment that I can transfer them to canvass—prevent them from vanishing away again ; nay, sometimes, by a sudden impulse, I can even sketch them in. But there my power ends ; I can feel and see what *ought* to be, yet when I begin to work, my faculties seem cramped and paralyzed ; spell-bound as it were ; and my brush drags languidly and heavily. The glorious hues, the beauty of form, and above all, the immortal expression, of which I dreamed, escapes me ; the mere mechanical part is all that rests with *me*. I pause and

study my picture ; all seems flat and tame ; no genius, no powerful grouping, no hint of greatness, can be discovered. And through this sense of disgraceful failure rise wild longings ; vain ambitious visions ; a deep feeling of the great and beautiful, which almost madden me. But perhaps, you do not know how terribly such fruitless struggles try one's fortitude."

"Not by personal experience ; but I can understand, and feel for you," said Reginald. "And I firmly believe that patient endurance is one of the greatest lessons that man or woman can learn. It is very difficult and painful to attain, but when once ours, it is far more to the purpose than many more brilliant qualities ; active courage, for instance ; for by means of it, we may be what we will."

"It cannot bestow genius."

"No, but it can aid it ; or even in a great measure, supply its place."

"Supply its place ? Impossible ! Oh, Re-

ginald, nothing on earth *can* supply the place of genius! It is a divine *gift*—which cannot be *acquired*.”

“Well; I suppose those who do not possess it, may be quite as happy without. It seems at best but a dangerous possession, and *I* manage very well without its aid.”

“You have more than average talents, however. *You* can *do*—or *be*, anything you please—”

“Except a great painter, sculptor, poet, or anything of that kind,” was the laughing answer. “It is well for me that I have no ambition.”

“You know what I mean. Whatever you *do* undertake, succeeds. Your abilities were spoken highly of at school.”

“And so were yours. If it had not been for ill-health, *you* might have stood far higher than I ever did.—”

“Perhaps,” said Arthur, sighing. “But that bodily weakness is the greatest curse

imaginable, for it affects the mind also, and destroys all chance of success."

"I can well believe that; otherwise you would not be so gloomy and despondent. And yet, *you have* genius; it were safer for you if you had not; for it keeps the mind and body at perpetual war."

"And wears them both out in the end. I see no happiness, no satisfaction, anywhere; and I suppose it ever has been,—ever will be the same. Those who cherish grand ideas, exalted views, and high notions of what *ought* to be; who would grasp that which alone is worth possessing, never *can* be contented upon earth."

"Then you ought to console yourself with thinking that it is the universal fate of genius; that 'the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,' nor this world a place where genius can meet with its reward. It is the curse which weighs upon us all, to remind us that this is not our home."

"Yet the curse does not seem to weigh heavily upon you. Oh, Reginald, *you* are contented, and can enjoy this life. I often envy your more happily constituted mind."

"I exact less, desire less; and therefore I am better satisfied. A small thing pleases my less-cultivated taste; and I know that you would scorn to change places with me, if you could."

"I wish I had the option. *Then* you should see,—for your health and strength alone, are worth all the crazy workings of a brain like mine!" cried Arthur, impatiently flinging down his brush. "I would give up every hope of future fame—"

"For the sake of common-place contentment?" asked his brother, smiling. "Arthur, you say so *now* beneath the influence of weariness and disgust, but I know you better than to believe your words. Nor ought you to speak slightly of the gifts bestowed upon you, for they were given for some better purpose than to be despised. Go on, and

prosper. You want patience, more than any other quality."

"I *have* been patient,—plodding on from day to day, and year to year; but when patience remains unrewarded, it cannot endure for ever; and often I feel inclined to *give in*, and end the struggle once for all. These gifts, or passionate desires, try one so sorely, that I think it would be better, if it were not cowardly, to lay them by for ever."

"Nay; that *would* be weak,—to turn back after you have advanced so far upon your way. And it would leave a void, too, in your daily life. You could not exist without some occupation and amusement."

"Amusement!" echoed Arthur, bitterly.

"I thought it *did* amuse you to carry out your ideas. You seem devoted to art."

"I am; but that is the source of my most deadly sufferings; the constant struggle,—the strain upon the nerves and brain,—and then, the accursed disappointment after all." He stamped his foot, and added, vehemently:—

“ Oh, I could hate myself,—hate everything, and everyone, when I am smarting under the disgraceful sense of failure! And if anybody praises me, it only makes the matter worse, for I *know* that they speak falsely, or from ignorance. I can see how very far my endeavours fall short of my aims, and nothing ever will satisfy me, but—”

“ Perfection,” interrupted Reginald, laughing. “ No, I wish it were not so; for you seem to be treading in the steps of all great geniuses. It appears to me that Byron and Shelley must have been most miserable men.”

“ And many others whom you have not named.”

“ I know it, and I do not envy them their greatness. To turn to my own profession for an instance, I *pity*, rather than *admire* Napoleon. What was his career, but vanity? His death at Longwood, on that lonely island, but the most powerful sermon on that never-ending theme? Think of the caged eagle wearing

out his last aimless days at St. Helena, tortured by impotent ambition, and beating his proud soul against those prison bars, which were to hold it captive till the end! Think of that, and moderate your desires.”

“But mine flow in a different channel. That which I would conquer, is far higher in reality than any of the objects which he,—or any other great general ever had in view; though to the *world* it is intangible,—unseen. You yourself said, that art was godlike, and I must not slight the heavenly gift.”

“True; but self-conquest is the greatest victory. Don’t vex and wear yourself, for calmness of mind is necessary to all noble enterprises.”

Arthur flung himself into a chair, and sighed.

“It is indeed. But how to be obtained? The ancient masters prepared themselves by prayer and fasting; then their hearts were purified, their vision cleared; and thus they were enabled to comprehend and achieve that—

which lies far beyond the reach of lower natures."

"So I have heard," said Reginald, standing before the sketch upon the easel. "But, Arthur, *this* is nobly conceived. Why should you not end as you have begun?"

"In one sense, I fear I shall." Arthur did not confess that he had been praying earnestly before he even touched the canvass, and that his whole heart was absorbed in the question of success or failure, for he feared that Reginald would think him full of crazy flights of fancy. He only added quietly: "St. Michael, the great archangel, leader of the warlike hosts of heaven, always was my favourite saint, and I have long desired to paint him, with the same deep feeling—But I weary you," he hastily exclaimed; and once more rising, he began to mix fresh colours on his palette.

"No; but I am wasting all your time," was the answer, as Reginald prepared to leave the room; pausing, however, to examine various paintings, most of them unfinished, which

were reared against the walls. "This is my favourite, this Madonna," he continued, pointing to a fair face, full of spiritual grace and sweetness. "It is like my mother."

"Yes, I thought of her,—I sketched it from her; she inspires me, as much as I ever can feel inspiration," was the warm response.

"He who could paint this need not think so lowly of his powers—" began Reginald; but he was interrupted by some one tapping lightly at the door.

CHAPTER XI.

BEATRICE.

You are so busy all day long, I feared
A woman's company and trifling talk
Would only importune you.

TAYLOR'S PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

REGINALD stepped forward and opened the door, with the careless exclamation :

“ Well, who is it ? ”

“ Beatrice,” was the answer, uttered by a young lady in a hat and cloak. “ May I come in ? ”

“ Most certainly,” said Reginald, his countenance lighting up with pleasure. “ Beatrice of Lynwood, you are welcome to our stronghold.”

And taking her hand, he led her in, with the friendly familiarity of an old acquaintance.

She laughed: saying:

“You make my name sound quite romantic: fit for a poem by Sir Walter Scott. But what does Arthur say to this intrusion?”

“That it is a very pleasant and timely one,” he answered, his colour deepening as he advanced to meet his visitor.

“I am glad to hear that,” returned Beatrice, as their hands met, “for the house seems quite deserted. I took the liberty of entering without ringing, and made my way to your mother’s sitting room; but no one was visible, so I came on here.”

“She is out with my father,” said Reginald.

“Ah! I expected you would all be out this lovely morning; even the industrious Arthur,—if he were not busied with any special piece of work. Is that the case? You are not looking well, and I fear it is because you never give yourself a holiday.”

Her air of interest sent a still deeper glow to Arthur's face, and he thanked her by a slight pressure of the hand, as he replied: "Oh, I am much as usual. Not particularly busy, though I always find enough to occupy my time. But *you* are looking—"

"Oh, no compliments. I know I always must look charming," was the laughing answer, as she half turned away.

"Especially in that wood-nymph costume," suggested Reginald. "It is really most becoming. Stand where you are, that I may study the effect."

Beatrice Mordaunt gaily complied with her old friend and play-fellow's request; first making him a lowly reverence; and as she stood in the middle of the uncarpeted room, she was as pleasing an object as the eye could desire to rest upon; her fine form and clear complexion being set off by the cool green dress and mantle, which folded softly round her graceful limbs, and by the shadow of her large brown hat. Her beauty was of a warm

and glowing description ; owing more to expression and richness of colouring, than to features ; brilliant hazel eyes, and dark glossy brown hair ; a proud, free bearing, and an open countenance ; she looking, in truth, exactly what she was :—a most attractive, generous, daring, and self-willed brunette of seventeen.

Lynwood was but a mile from Stapleton, and the walk was very popular, both with the two brothers and with Beatrice, whose mother and Mrs. Wilton had been early friends ; and now her face glowed with exercise and animation, as she looked around with a quick eager glance. She suffered Reginald to admire or criticise her silently for about a minute, but then exclaimed in a tone of playful defiance :
“ Now, sir, pray favour us with your opinion. Is my dress fortunate enough to suit your taste ? ”

“ It is. You ought always to wear green ; it suits you admirably.”

“ Oh, thank you ! But I prefer an occa-

sional change ; for as my old copy book used to tell me, 'Variety is pleasing.' And, besides, I feel so hot with my exertions, that I must begin my muslin dresses. This is May, you know," she added, taking off her hat, and smoothing the luxuriant masses of her hair.

"It will be a pity to discard the soft green dress ; Arthur ought to sketch you in it first."

Beatrice laughed, and turned inquiringly towards Arthur, who was gazing so fixedly at her, that he almost started.

"Yes, I was just thinking so," he said.

She coloured a little, and asked quickly :

"What are you at work upon at present ? Anything I have not seen, or heard of ? May I look ?"

"Not yet," returned Arthur, placing himself between her and the picture which he had just commenced, "I would rather not until I have made farther progress."

Beatrice looked at him reproachfully, and said :

“Unkind! I know that *Reginald* would not have treated me so ill.”

Arthur’s countenance betrayed the effect which even this jesting remark produced upon his sensitive feelings; and his brother perceiving it hastened to say:

“Do not tease him, Beatrice. His labours have fatigued him.”

“Yes,” added Arthur, forcing a smile, “you had better leave me to myself, for I am in one of my dark moods this morning:—out of sorts, and out of humour with myself and everyone.”

“Ah,” exclaimed Beatrice, her tone and manner changing instantly: “I felt certain from your looks that you were overtired; and it is wrong of you, Arthur, to overtask your strength.”

He made no answer, but once more took up his brush. *Reginald*, acting upon this hint, touched Beatrice gently upon the arm.

“Come; let us leave him. We are only in the way.”

"If he wishes it," was the reluctant answer."

Arthur looked up, and encountered her appealing glance, which sent a new accession of colour to his cheek and brow, so colourless on ordinary occasions.

"No; don't go. I did not mean that. I am *always* glad to see you," he replied, in some confusion.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Ask Reginald, if you please."

"No: your word is sufficient. I shall have no scruples, now."

"Then sit down, and make yourself comfortable. You must be tired, and we have neither of us had the politeness to offer you a chair."

Beatrice laughed, and seating herself, answered:

"No, you were both of you very ungallant. Pray don't trouble yourself, Reginald; you see it is too late now. It is well that I am able to wait upon myself."

"I quite agree with you, Miss Mordaunt," was the answer, as he himself dropped into the chair which he was bringing; an act which called forth the remarks:

"How civil! Truly you improve in manners!"

"I only echoed your own sentiment. You would not have me contradict a lady?"

"You are not worth answering. I shall not notice your impertinence," said Beatrice, glancing gaily at Reginald, and then turning her eyes more seriously upon Arthur, who was bending down, apparently engaged with his employment. But a close observer might have seen that his hand was trembling with excitement. *She* saw it, and the half sad, half irritable expression of his eyes, and suppressed a sigh, as she said quietly:

"You have not been to see us lately. Arthur, it would do you good to go out more."

He answered without looking up.

"I have not had time,—and the sun appears so hot."

"Perhaps you are right. It might fatigue you."

He now looked at her, with a sudden expression of impatience.

"What! To walk half a mile? You must consider me a poor, weak creature! But if *you* can do it, I should think that *I* can too!"

"Oh, Arthur, you spoke truly when you said that you were cross. I really dare scarcely speak to you this morning."

Arthur looked ashamed of his waywardness.

"I *am* unreasonable; but don't mind me, —for I cannot help it. Surely, by this time, you must have grown accustomed to my ways."

Beatrice rose, and approached him.

"You wear yourself out, bodily and mentally; and that is *why* you are unreasonable. Lay aside your brush, and come into the garden; just to please me, Arthur, for it feels so pleasant in the open air."

He hesitated.

"Come," she added, in a coaxing tone: "I am jealous of your profession, for it takes away your whole attention from myself, and you know I like attention. Let us for once enjoy a pleasant talk,—a luxury I have lately learned to prize."

"From its rarity," said Reginald; whilst his brother smiled, and showed signs of yielding; finally suffering Beatrice to gain the victory.

She again put on her hat, and led the way, as if quite at home at Stapleton; and they were soon wandering through the old-fashioned gardens,—under the shade of straight yew hedges, and thence out into the warmth of sunny terraces. Flowers, and flowering shrubs abounded; here a Triton flung up glittering drops of water high into the air; and here a stone sun-dial marked the flight of time.

Beatrice listened with pleasure to the murmur of the ever falling shower; and casting

herself down upon the grass, dipped her white hand into the cool, clear water of the fountain; saying:

“Oh, how pleasant! This is quite refreshing. How I love the sound of falling water on a bright, still day like this. Don’t you think, Arthur, that you are better here than shut up in that horrid studio?”

“Perhaps.—*You* seem as though you contrived to extract some enjoyment out of life.”

“And why not? It is wisest to make the most of every happy moment;—for *my* life is not all sunshine,—though you seem to think so.”

Arthur looked earnestly at her, as he answered:

“I suppose no one *can* have the sunshine without a few occasional clouds; though some people are far, *far* more fortunate in that respect than others.”

“I doubt that,” said Reginald; “and fancy that such matters are far more evenly ordered than you imagine; only, whilst we feel our

own troubles, we seldom can enter into those of others."

Arthur still seemed unconvinced; but Beatrice spoke before him.

"Reginald, I quite agree with you; and believe that if we could look into the hearts of all the people that we know,—especially those who seem most enviable in all respects, we should find a *something* which would make us unwilling to change places with them after all!"

She sighed as she finished speaking, and once more turned her attention to the fountain.

"So I think," was the reply.

"But," persisted Arthur, "there is a great difference,—say what you will. You two appear happy and contented; you have health and strength; keen powers of enjoyment,—and no wearing passions to torment you; therefore, I, who suffer both from bodily weakness, and from feelings which you cannot share, do often look upon you both with envy. You cannot deny it, Beatrice; *your* pleasures are

not few and far between. You *can* enjoy life thoroughly. You look quite happy now."

"Is it a sin?" she answered. "I am *always* happy *here*."

Her voice softened, and both the words and tone touched Arthur deeply.

"A sin! No, Beatrice, it does me good to hear you say so. I am thankful, that *you*, at least, are not—"

"As full of forebodings and repinings as yourself," exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, rising and endeavouring to rally him out of his despondent humour. "I am also thankful that it is not so. But Arthur," (more seriously), "if you wish to know the truth, your melancholy humours often cause me more unhappiness than anything."

"Do they? I am sorry. I must endeavour to conceal them better."

"No, no! Do not talk about *concealment*. You must *overcome* them."

"It is easy for *you* to say so, but—don't

think about me, Beatrice. Why need you vex yourself on *my* account?"

"Don't ask such foolish questions. Let it suffice that I *do* think about you,—and ever shall. But all the same," she added, more lightly, "I have not the slightest intention of *pitying* you; on the contrary, I intend to laugh or scold you out of all these gloomy fancies."

"*Fancies!*" echoed Arthur. "But I wish you could."

"And so do I, with all my heart," said Reginald; who was growing weary of these long discussions. "Beatrice will you come and visit the conservatory?"

"With pleasure. Anything to raise my spirits."

"And *I* have damped them! I had better leave you," said Arthur, turning drearily away.

"To mope by yourself in the owl-light of that wretched studio; Reginald, don't let him! Make him stay!"

Reginald accordingly laid a detaining hand upon his brother's arm ; exclaiming :

“ No, indeed you shall not. We will keep you by force if necessary.”

Arthur, secretly pleased by the interest he excited, suffered himself to be once more persuaded ; and with a shrug of his shoulders and an “ As you will ! ” accompanied Beatrice and Reginald into the conservatory ; his eye wandering to the former, whenever it could do so unobserved.

The sun shone full upon the glass roof, and the air within was rich and enervating from the heat and scent of flowers. Beatrice knew it was not good for Arthur, so after a hasty glance around her at the bright azaleas, petunias, and other beautiful exotics, above most of which towered tall arum lilies, curling their one thick white leaf over to the light, she turned to the door ; exclaiming :

“ Oh, how charming ! And in what nice order everything is kept ! Those lilies are such favourites of mine. But come out, Ar-

that, for the heat is killing; and much as we may admire the productions of a tropical climate, our constitutions will not endure its oppressive qualities."

So saying, she led the way to a shady seat, where Arthur at once sank down in languid silence; whilst Reginald, after enquiring: "will you not have some flowers?" and receiving a ready assent from Beatrice, returned to the conservatory, and left them *tete-à-tete*. After a few moments of abstraction, Arthur spoke.

"A tropical climate, with all its luxuriant beauty! I should like to see those lilies growing in their native country."

"And so should I," returned Beatrice, with animation. "And the giant forests; and the mighty rivers rolling along in majesty. What a pity it is we cannot go together!"

"Ah, Beatrice, *you* are jesting; but with *me*, the desire to see something new, to meet with some change to vary the monotony of my existence, has become a passion. Those

far lands are so much grander too, and full of wild, free beauty, instead of being tame, like _____”

“ Poor old England ! *Dear* old England ; you shall not say one word against her, with her fresh green meadows, and her shady lanes. Where would you find such in the parched-up tropics ? ”

“ I could dispense with them ; for *there* are hedges of myrtles and geraniums ; shadowy forests——”

“ Full of serpents and wild beasts ! ” cried Beatrice ; as if from the very spirit of contradiction. “ And *there* sweeps the wild tornado ; lurks the pestilence amidst crocodile-infested swamps ; rocks the earthquake, and burns the terrible volcano. ”

“ I should like to see them all ; the terrible and beautiful ; the good and evil, mingled ;—*then*, if I died—I should have lived my life. Nothing is so hateful as stagnation,—death in life ! ”

“ And die you would, ” returned Beatrice,

in a tone of decision. "Poisoned, perhaps, by the insidious malaria which is born of the breath of those gorgeous, heavy-scented flowers; or struck down by the rays of that dazzling, scorching sun."

"Well, be it so! One moment of enjoyment, is worth whole years of toil and pain."

"Arthur, do you call yourself a Christian?"

"Do not ask. I scarcely know."

"Because you sound more like an Epicurean, when you give utterance to such sentiments. Do we live for this life only, and is it to be all pleasure?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed Arthur, answering the first part of her question; "for if we *did*, we should indeed be miserable. But why should *I* stagnate, whilst the whole world is moving forwards?"

"I thought you were devoted to your art; that it was all-sufficient for your mind?"

He answered bitterly:

"Oh, Beatrice, you little know the truth."

But he had not time to say more, for here

Reginald joined them, bearing a beautiful bouquet in his hand.

“Will this content you? I have done my best.”

Beatrice sprang up to receive the offering; rewarding Reginald by a look of affectionate gratitude,—which excited still more bitter feelings in his brother’s heart.

“Oh, thank you! These are beautiful indeed! Look, Arthur, is it not better to enjoy them in the cool green shade of England?”

“Italy would please me better,—since I may not venture to the tropics,—for *there* is warmth, and light, and colouring.”

He spoke coldly; provoking Beatrice to say:

“I thought you hated light,—since I always find you wrapped in twilight gloom.”

“I suppose it is necessary to the success of his paintings,” interposed Reginald; “though I confess *I* do not like it! Give *me* light and freedom, and an out-door life!”

Arthur’s brow contracted; but Beatrice did not perceive it, or she would not have added:

"Amen! Liberty and sunshine are *my* choice also. Reginald, you should have lived some centuries ago; have been a knight of the olden time; a bold crusader;—and Arthur should have been the minstrel to recount your glorious deeds. Would not that have suited you?" she enquired, turning towards the latter; who replied with sudden irritation:

"No!—Thanks to you, all the same,—for apportioning me such a secondary part! But, excuse me; I am wasting time. I ought even now to be shrouded in that same dismal owl-light which provokes your scorn."

And, whilst he spoke, he rose abruptly to depart. Beatrice gazed after him in consternation.

"How have I offended you?" she asked.

"You are mistaken," was the cold reply. "I am merely anxious to make up for lost time; therefore, I must say good-morning."

She would have made another effort to prevent him, had not Reginald laid his hand upon her arm, and whispered:

“Let him go. Remonstrance would be vain.”

So with a heavy sigh, she closed her lips; contenting herself with watching Arthur as he slowly disappeared;—a strange compound of beauty and infirmity; of good and evil. But at length:

“Oh, is it not sad to see him?” she exclaimed, tears starting to her eyes. “To think what he *might* be,—and what suffering and passion make him! Reginald, it grieves me to the heart.”

He also sighed.

“Poor Arthur! It is a melancholy sight; but it seems to me wisest and kindest to leave him to himself. I am sorry though that *you* should see him thus,—not that *you* would misjudge him,—but it troubles me upon your own account.”

“Oh, never mind me!” said Beatrice, affecting to laugh, whilst a leaden weight seemed pressed upon her heart. “No-one does! But I am competent to take care of myself.

And now I am going home. Perhaps you will come with me part of the way,—if you have not anything better to do?”

“With pleasure,” was the willing answer; and the two set out towards Lynwood; taking a short cut across the fields, and talking chiefly about Arthur and his future prospects.

About Arthur, who was even then locked into his painting room, endeavouring, with unsteady hand and dizzy brain, to put life and expression into his *St. Michael*;—but in vain!

The high ideal was obscured by clouds of passion, and the colours which he laid upon the canvass, heavy and exaggerated,—as unfit for the representation of an ethereal being, as could possibly be imagined. He gave way to still more passionate despair; effacing his work, and making yet another and another effort, with still worse success; for the more excited he became, the more earthly and common-place became his glorious arch-angel,—so vividly imagined

but a few short hours before ! He flung his brush from him, and shed burning tears, bowing his head upon his hands in agony ; and through his trouble came the image of Beatrice ; fresh and beautiful, and like a wood-nymph (as Reginald had said,) in her green dress, with its artistic folds.

As if mechanically, he took up a pencil, and began to sketch her face and figure ; then becoming aware of his employment, he desisted for a moment, only to return to it in the next. But at last, starting up, he crushed the paper in his hand, exclaiming :

“ This is folly ! Why do I keep thinking, —dreaming of *her* ? Of *them* ? *She* does not think about *me*,—when I am not in her sight. Oh, God, forgive me,—and support me under all these trials ! ”

And sinking upon his knees, he prayed wildly : raising his thin hands and tearful eyes to heaven ; and striving to shake off the oppressive load of sorrow, which seemed to weigh upon him more heavily than it had

ever done before ; though his whole youth had been filled with care and disappointment. The storm of passion had exhausted him ; and soon the languor succeeding over-excitement, if not the peace and hope inspired by religion, sank down upon his mind, and he *appeared* more calm.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLANCE AT LYNWOOD.

"O, who can speak the vigorous joys of health!
Unclogged the body, unobscured the mind;
The morning rises gay, with pleasing stealth;
The temperate evening falls serene and kind.

But here, instead, is fostered every ill
Which our distempered minds or bodies know."
THOMPSON'S CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

"WILL you not come in?" asked Beatrice, when she and her companion had arrived at Lynwood: but Reginald shook his head, and answered:

"Not to-day. My father and mother will have returned home, and will expect to see one of us. Arthur will probably be invisible,

and so I must appear at luncheon. But if you don't visit us, I shall come and see you again to-morrow."

"As you will," was the reply. "You know that you are always welcome here."

Reginald gave an assenting smile, and the two parted; Beatrice recollecting with a sigh, as she entered the house, that Arthur had—and almost in the self-same words,—made that very observation to herself that morning.

"Always glad to see me! Yet he did not seem so. How I wish that I knew better how to please him!"

Thus thinking, she opened the drawing-room door, and was at once greeted by a cold look of displeasure from her mother, who, however, did not address her, but compressing her lips, again looked down upon a book, which she either was, or seemed to be reading. Beatrice was used to such receptions, though they always annoyed, and made her feel rebellious. She took off her hat, with a

slight gesture of impatience, as though overpowered by heat, and throwing herself into an easy chair, said carelessly :

“I have just been to Stapleton.”

“So I suppose. You said that you were going there.”

Such was Mrs. Mordaunt's brief, and not very encouraging reply : but Beatrice made another effort.

“Have *you* been out yet, mama?”

“No.”

“It is very pleasant, but so hot.”

Now Mrs. Mordaunt was a disappointed woman ; naturally *very* kind-hearted, though always reserved and prone to take offence : and a husband who was weary of, and irritated her by systematic rudeness and neglect, was not likely to improve either her temper or spirits. She was a constant sufferer from ill-health ; and not even the society of her bright, active daughter, had power to rouse her from a sense of overpowering misery. On the contrary, she often almost envied her

sound constitution and high spirits; nay, was even jealous of the influence which Beatrice exercised over her father, and which far out-weighed her own. Lynwood was an unhappy house; and the two ladies,—one so sad and careworn, whilst the other was all warmth and impetuosity, unfortunately, could not have much in common; hence the coldness of manner, on the one hand, which Beatrice, who but dimly understood her mother's troubles, thought so hard; and hence, also, the occasional vehement outbursts of the other. And yet, through all these misunderstandings and seeming estrangement, both mother and daughter loved one another truly, and each would have done, or sacrificed much, to promote the happiness of child or parent. But still—still, the impetuous Beatrice, craving love and sympathy, and their *outward* manifestations, was sometimes actually jealous in her turn of the caresses bestowed upon her mother's favourite little dogs. At the present moment, the mere fact

of receiving no answer to her trifling remark about the weather, made Beatrice more angry than the bitterest reproaches need have done; and rising hastily, she went to her own room at once, to smooth her hair, and lay aside her cloak: her face glowing as much with anger as with exercise.

“What have I done?” she said, half aloud. “It is hard that—Arthur—everyone, should treat me thus; and without my being conscious of the slightest fault!”

She lingered a little, chafing under this new grievance, but at length returned to the drawing room, and seating herself in silence, was about to take up a book, when she was roused by her mother enquiring:

“Are you not coming in to luncheon?”

She rose instantly.

“Of course; but I did not know that it was ready.”

“You know the usual hour; it has been waiting some time.”

Beatrice, pre-occupied, *had* quite forgotten: and now she began impatiently:

"Oh, I am sorry ! I was not aware that it was so late—" But at the sight of her mother's countenance,—more full of suffering even, than of dissatisfaction, and her hand pressed upon her brow, her rebellious looks at once softened into an expression of concern, and she added gently ; " Your head aches badly I am sure."

Mrs. Mordaunt's manner also softened a little as she answered :

"It does. But never mind, dear ; that is nothing new. Let us go to luncheon, for, though I cannot eat, I dare say your walk has made *you* hungry."

"Rather.—But, mamma, why did you not tell me sooner ; for then I would not have left you all alone ?"

"You could not have done anything for me ; and I fear I am but a dull companion at the best of times," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with returning dreariness.

Beatrice sighed, and the two sat down to their dull repast ; Mrs. Mordaunt sitting by

and looking on, whilst Beatrice, chilled, and her appetite spoiled by her mother's uncheering influence, desperately went on eating,—just to save appearances.

All was silence at the first ; but at length, after drinking a little wine and water, and eating a crust of bread, Mrs. Mordaunt brightened up and said :

“ So you have been to Stapleton ! Who did you see there ? ”

“ Only the two boys. Both Mr. and Mrs. Wilton were out,” was the reply.

“ And how was Arthur ? ”

“ Not much better,” answered Beatrice, with a sigh.

“ Ah, poor thing, I fear he never will be,” returned Mrs. Mordaunt, in a tone of pity, which jarred upon her daughter's feelings ; for the latter would have had Arthur be an object of respectful admiration, not of degrading compassion ; so she fired up ; saying :

“ I don't know that. I cannot bear to hear you say so.”

"Why so? I don't think he ever can be good for much,—poor fellow!"

"Oh, mamma!"

Mrs. Mordaunt took no notice of this reproachful exclamation, asking next:

"And what was Reginald about?"

"He was with Arthur in his painting room, and came back with me as far as the door."

"Why did he not come in?"

"Because he said that he must get home again."

"Oh, I suppose he did not care to see *me*."

"Don't say so, mamma. He thought his mother would expect him back."

"There was Arthur."

"True,"—was the doubtful answer. "You must scold Reginald when next you see him."

Mrs. Mordaunt made no answer, and the subject dropped. Wheels within wheels! Who shall say where lie the secret springs of discord and unhappiness? Mr. Mordaunt's over-bearing temper chafed his wife into a

constant state of irritation ; and thence re-acting upon Beatrice, cast a chilling shadow over her naturally joyous and impulsive disposition.

After a pause, Beatrice enquired :

“ Where is Papa ? Gone to the meeting he was speaking of ? ”

“ Yes ; and I am glad of it ; for he has been in and out continually ; but *now*, I am thankful to say, I shall have a little peace.”

“ And he dines out also ? ”

“ I believe so,” answered Mrs. Mordaunt, in a tone which showed how much she also *hoped* so.

They rose, and returned into the drawing-room, where the blinds, drawn down so as to shield Mrs. Mordaunt's weak eyes from the light, cast a gloom over all things, most oppressive to Beatrice, who could have gazed like a young eagle upon the sun. Gasping for air and sunshine, she stepped through the open window into the verandah, which, from the outside, gave the house a more cheerful

aspect; whilst viewed from within, it only added to the darkness. Beatrice's heart was full of wild longings for life, light, love, and happiness; and drawing a deep breath, she exclaimed, involuntarily :

"Let there be light ! To *me* it is the first of blessings." Then returning to the room, she found her mother reclining wearily upon a sofa, shading her eyes from even that faint gleam, and at once she reproached herself for selfishness. How to make atonement was the next thought, and her eyes roving round, fell upon the flowers, from Stapleton. She approached her mother.

"Mamma, will you arrange these. You will do it best."

Mrs. Mordaunt, who was passionately fond of flowers, at once revived.

"Ah !—you did not show me them before."

"I forgot," answered Beatrice, leaving the room, and speedily returning with a white rosted glass, filled with water, which she

placed upon a small table close beside her mother. Little dreaming of the act of self-denial which Beatrice was even then performing,—for the flowers were dear to her, both for their own sake, and that of association—the latter began to examine and arrange them; hanging fondly over every bud and leaf; and her daughter was more than repaid for the slight sacrifice which she had made;—happy to think that she had in some measure atoned for the evil thoughts which had been striving for mastery in her heart. Fixing her eyes upon her mother, whose faded cheek and drawn expression bore witness to the severity of the trials she had passed through, Beatrice felt a rush of tender and remorseful feelings. She was unreasonable,—ungrateful; and many instances of anxious love and care for her happiness, were at once brought back to memory, as she sat penitently by the open window, watching some clouds which were beginning to obscure the sun.

Yet still, the clouds seemed to cast their

shadow on her soul. What a life was hers ! Her father, mother, Arthur, all whom she loved, conspired to fill her mind with grief and self-reproach ; and the future seemed so very, very cheerless !

“ Now look, Beatrice ! ”

These few words aroused her, and she started up to praise her mother's tasteful arrangement of the flowers. Then they went out ; for she contrived to persuade Mrs. Mor-daunt that the air would do her good ; but, alas ! the fineness of the day had passed already, and more than one heavy drop fell even whilst Beatrice, waiting for her mother, paced up and down the ill-kept garden walks.

“ A contrast to the grounds at Stapleton ! ” she thought. And well might she, remembering how bright and smooth the latter had looked that very morning, gaze with distaste upon the ragged, neglected-looking paths and flower beds, which surrounded her own home. For her father cared but little for such matters ; the men were always wanted, either

in the stables, or for other out-door work; and all that *was* done in the garden, was done chiefly by Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter; the latter working with all the energy of youth and health; the former languidly, by sudden fits and starts.

She had pulled up a weed or two, and taken a peep at her pet bed of lilies of the valley, by the time her mother joined her; when they set out for a walk across the fields; Mrs. Mordaunt presently stopping to call at some poor person's cottage; for spite of ill-health and coldness of manner, her heart was really soft and kind; and the act of doing good was like a cordial to her drooping spirits. She began to converse cheerfully with Beatrice, when down poured the rain, and they had to hurry home again; both being thoroughly wet and tired, and Beatrice heated with her exertions ere they reached the door. Then followed a dull dinner: for Mrs. Mordaunt was chilled in mind and body

by the drenching shower ; and to her daughter's dismay, she rang to give orders for a fire to be lighted in the drawing-room.

Beatrice thought the evening, notwithstanding the damp, oppressive, for her temperament was warmer, and her pulses beat more strongly than her mother's. Moreover, she pictured her father returning hot and angry, (as he often did), and with flushed cheeks and feelings of horror, she watched the sticks blazing and crackling, from the very farthest corner of the room. Mrs. Mordaunt, had, on the contrary, drawn her chair so close to the fire, that her feet rested on the fender ; and perceiving that Beatrice had retired to a distance, she said in a tone of cold reproach :—

“ Do you find the room too warm ? I am sorry ; but it cannot be helped now. You had better open the window.”

“ Oh ! no. I do very well here,” was the answer.

Mrs. Mordaunt, however, rose and opened

it ; so that whilst the fire threw out a powerful heat at one end of the room, a damp air blew in at the other.

“ I am sorry,” she observed, “ that anyone should be inconvenienced on *my* account. Come, my little doggie, come and sit upon my knee, and warm yourself.”

Thus saying, she resumed her seat, and took a book ; Beatrice also endeavouring to read. But it was one of the dark days at Lynwood, when everyone and everything went wrong. Presently it grew dark ; lights were brought in ; Mrs. Mordaunt dropped her book and nodded in her chair ; and Beatrice, after gazing sadly on the damp walls and drooping shrubs without, gently closed the window, then settled again to her book until tea appeared. Consequently, the evening was long, and not too cheerful ; but still it seemed to have passed too quickly, when she heard her father’s voice and step without. She glanced anxiously at the fire, and was glad to see that it was almost out ; yet still the room

was warm—too warm for her, who had been sitting quietly reading; how then would he find it, coming home from a public dinner, and through the damp night air afterwards?

He did not enter, however, until he had put on his dressing gown and slippers; and then his first action was to blow out one of the two candles which were burning on the table, saying:—

“I should think you could see to do nothing without all this light.”

“Thanks. But I was reading,” answered Beatrice.

“Pshaw!” He turned towards Mrs. Mordaunt, who had roused herself: “And you were roasting, I suppose? Really, it seems as if you could not waste enough; but if you burn so much coal in summer, you shall do without it in the winter.”

Mrs. Mordaunt made no other reply than by turning from him with an air of extreme disgust; and he proceeded forthwith to make a few more equally enlivening remarks;

looking round for fitting subjects, as he stood upon the hearthrug; his eyes dazzled by the change from darkness to light, and fierce and bloodshot from the wine he had been drinking. In truth, his whole appearance was anything but attractive; a powerfully-made figure, not extremely tall, but broad in the shoulders, and a face with strongly-marked, harsh features; the lower ones being full and swollen, as if from self-indulgent habits, showing to what violent passions had reduced him—something lower than a gentleman, and weaker than a man.

And yet he had once been very different. Women had thought him handsome and agreeable. His wife *once* thought so, but her sentiments had long been changed; and even his daughter could scarcely render him respect. Beatrice, to whom he showed more kindness, and whom he permitted to exercise more influence over him than anyone besides; she also clearly saw how he had fallen; and at that moment she unconsciously contrasted him

with Mr. Wilton, upright in form, intelligent in countenance, proud, slightly sarcastic, but ever courteous in manner. Such was the one! The other—oh! how different! And that other was her father! She felt shame for him; and sat with closed lips like her mother. But, at length, her patience being well-nigh exhausted, she looked up quickly, saying:—

“Really, Papa, you are come home in a very pleasant humour! We were very quiet and comfortable till *you* appeared.”

“I do not doubt it. You are always happy whilst you are doing nothing but wasting time and money. I wish to goodness some of you would learn to be of use.” No answer being returned to this remark, he presently added: “I should think you had much better go to bed.”

“Presently,” said Beatrice, “are *you* tired?”

“Tired of *you*. I’m going to smoke.”

So saying, he turned towards the door, giving his wife’s little dog a parting kick by the way; which of course drew forth a yelp

from the injured animal, and roused its mistress to a fierce remonstrance.

“How can you be so brutal? You are always hurting the poor little thing,—because it happens to be *mine*.”

“I don’t care whose it is,—confound it! It was underneath my feet. I wish you’d get rid of it;—it’s always in the way.”

Then Beatrice’s eyes flashed, and she rose up tall and proud before him, to defend her mother.

“You have no right to behave so. It is cruel and unmanly.”

Mr. Mordaunt drew back from her, and evidently winced at this remark; but he tried to brave it out by saying sullenly:

“Wait till you are spoken to, young lady. No one asked for *your* opinion.”

“But you have it *unasked*,” was her vehement reply.

“I shall please myself,” he muttered, as he left the room.

Beatrice gazed after him with a countenance

glowing with resentment, then, her manner softening, she turned towards her mother.

“Do not mind about it, dear Mamma.”

But Mrs. Mordaunt did not seem to hear, being occupied in fondling and comforting her insulted favourite, and her daughter absolutely trembled with impatience and jealousy; for in her turn she was jealous—even of a little dog. Her tone changed; and taking up a candle, she said: “Good night. I am going,” almost as coldly as Mrs. Mordaunt herself might have done. “Good night,” returned her mother, slightly inclining her head to receive the proffered kiss, and without lifting her eyes from the coaxing animal upon her lap. “What is it, my precious?” she continued, speaking to the latter, “Is it tired? They shall not hurt it. No, they shall not. It shall go to sleep.” And bending over it, she kissed it more fondly than she ever kissed her daughter.

This was too much for Beatrice, who left the room with anger burning fiercely in her

heart; for she was as yet too young to comprehend, or make allowances for the caprices of ill-health and disappointment. She knew that her mother was not happy; but she little thought *how* miserable and hopeless her whole life had become—bound as she was to one who made no effort to conceal his weariness of her society, but on the contrary, seemed to take a pleasure in treating her in the most insulting and contemptuous manner. There is no more wretched spectacle than that of an unhappy and neglected wife, for death only—her own, or that of her tormentor, can free her from her sufferings, unless she have recourse to means from which every delicate-minded woman must recoil; and Mrs. Mordaunt had borne much in silence, partly for the sake of peace, the credit of the family, and out of decency; but chiefly for her daughter's sake. Beatrice had yet to learn the great lessons of patience, forbearance, and forgetfulness of self, and she felt bitterly aggrieved, exclaim-

“No one cares for me! No one is kind to me! Not even Arthur, though, thank heaven I was not angry with *him*. It *is* hard, for I have done nothing to deserve it; yet that dog is far dearer to my mother—far more necessary to her happiness than I, who, God knows, would do *anything* to please her. She rejects my advances. Be it so! I will not force myself upon her notice. Why do people care more for dogs, I wonder, than for those who have human souls and feelings, unless it is because they flatter them, by accepting their good qualities, without appearing conscious of their failings? Yet dogs are faithful creatures, and it *is* something to possess the love of any living thing. I could wish that I had one to care for me, for I feel so lonely,—not because I reject the sympathy of those who *ought* to love me,—but because they, who might have mine, despise it. Why is this? And must it, spite of my utmost efforts, always be the same?”

Her pillow was wet with passionate tears,

and it was late before she slept; the later, that she heard her mother stirring in her dressing room for a long time afterwards, talking to her dog, and soothing him to sleep upon a sofa. It *did* appear capricious and unjust that whilst he was coaxed and loaded with endearing epithets, poor Beatrice,—so full of all warm and generous affections—should be left to grieve in solitude and silence, and as it were, to stretch out her arms in darkness, in the vain hope of finding some one who would love her, some one upon whom she might rely. One gentle word, one soft caress, even a careless visit from her mother, would have driven the dark spirit from her heart, and changed her wakefulness to peaceful rest: but that was withheld; or rather it did not occur to Mrs. Mordaunt, engrossed as she was with her own trouble, that anything was wanting towards her daughter. If she thought of Beatrice at all, it was to picture her contented and indifferent; her mind

occupied with girlish plans, or sleeping soundly,—instead of shedding tears of heart-felt sorrow, and searching blindly for some one to lean upon, and to fill the void occasioned by neglect.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STORM SUCCEEDED BY A CALM.

"She loved too soon in life ; her dawn
Was bright with sunbeams, whence is drawn
A sure prognostic that the day
Will not unclouded pass away.
Too young she loved,—and he on whom
Her first love lighted, in the bloom
Of boyhood was, and so was graced
With all that earliest runs to waste.

PHILIP VON ARTEVELDE

A FEW hours of troubled rest had in some measure calmed Beatrice's passionate longings, and dulled the sense of injury.

"I must resign myself to my fate. Must exercise philosophy," she thought; and in that frame of mind she descended to the breakfast room.

No one was down, and she had long to wait, for Mrs. Mordaunt always breakfasted up stairs, and her father was often very late indeed. The hours at Lynwood were most irregular, and much time wasted waiting for one or another, though Beatrice herself was generally early. It was Mr. Mordaunt's custom to sit smoking until after midnight,—sometimes even much later, though he had no companion to participate in his employment (or enjoyment, as he seemed to find it;) and when morning came, he was seldom benefited, either in health or temper, by such vigils.

Beatrice employed the spare time, which might otherwise have hung so heavy on her hands, by a visit to the little, ill-stocked greenhouse, in which she cultivated a few straggling plants, and a ramble round the garden; ending with a long halt amongst her lilies.

She meditated (if circumstances would permit), a second flight to Stapleton; and care-

fully gathered a tempting bunch of the delicate flowers and their cool, dark-green leaves, as a peace-offering for Arthur, whom she had unwittingly offended. Placing them in water to keep them fresh until the time of her departure, she was still lingering round them, when she heard her father's step, and at once she flew to her post, and ordered in the urn.

Mr. Mordaunt looked scarcely improved in amiability; his eyes were red and swollen, and his manner uncertain,—albeit he condescendingly permitted his handsome, blooming daughter to touch just the tip of his whisker with her lips. She not only *accepted*, but even *sought* the proffered honour, such a ceremony being a matter of course; so much so, in fact, that it did not strike her as being strange; and she seated herself at table with the observation that it was a fine morning, and the rain had freshened everything.

“Hum!” was the answer. “It was damp enough, last evening.”

“Yes, but it has laid the dust, and will

make the plants grow. See, how green the grass looks."

"Like your dress. Why will you wear that horrid thing?"

"Do you dislike it?" asked Beatrice, remembering the compliments paid to it but the day before. "*I* fancied it was pretty and becoming."

"Pretty *unbecoming*! You are right there," he retorted, wilfully misunderstanding what she said. "How could *anyone* look well in such a colour? Throw it away. I *hate* it, and will burn it, if you put it on again."

Beatrice coloured, and answered drily:

"That would be waste, in my opinion."

"Eh! what! Speak a little louder, if you intend *me* to hear," said Mr. Mordaunt, affecting sudden deafness. But his daughter did not think it worth while; and there was silence for some minutes afterwards; broken at length by the abrupt question: "Why has Mrs. Mordaunt given Mary Newell warning?"

"Because she was impertinent, I believe."

"Stuff! I always found her civil and obliging. And I like Mary: she is a very good sort of girl."

"Very likely," was the brief reply.

"I believe," continued Mr. Mordaunt, with increasing wrath, "she only did it to annoy me, and because the girl happened to be good-looking. I hate your ugly women; and I will not have them either. It is most confounded impertinence to meddle with *my* servants."

"I always understood that the *ladies* of a household managed such affairs."

Mr. Mordaunt swore to himself, but made no further answer; and again there was an interval of silence. Finally, however, on rising to leave the room, he observed:

"I was going to have asked you whether you would ride, but I don't know whether it is worth my while."

"As you please," returned Beatrice, haughtily; then after a short pause she added:

“My mother used to be fond of riding, and such exercise was recommended; but she never has the chance now.”

“Let her ride,—with anyone she pleases—and wherever she pleases—so that it is not with me! To the——”

“Hush!” was the imperative command. “I will not listen to such language, or go out with you.”

And once more silenced in the midst of his violent exclamations, Mr. Mordaunt flung himself out into the hall, seized his hat, and went off to the stables. Beatrice listened with flushed cheek, and beating heart until she knew that he was safely off: having ascertained which fact, she sat down to draw until her mother should come down, and signify her pleasure as to the disposal of the remainder of the morning.

Her hand was unsteady, and unable to obey her will; consequently the effort was painful at first, though the subject,—a lovely peaceful lake, girt round by mountains, and

with some scattered blocks of stone, and a group of bending aspens in the foreground,—was calculated at once to soothe and please her imagination. But by degrees, she worked with far more interest, suffering her thoughts to wander away from the harsh realities of her every-day life, to a pleasant dreamland, where no cares could come.

Arthur had lent her the little water-colour sketch, which she was copying, and the hope of his approval inspired her with new energy. She was satisfied with the progress she was making, and might have finished her drawing in a manner highly satisfactory to herself, had not her mother entered, just when her labours were half concluded.

“What are you doing, Beatrice?” she asked, approaching; then casting her eyes towards the window: “What a horrid glare of light! Do you mind this blind being drawn down a little?”

“Not at all,” was the not *quite* truthful answer, as the upper part of the drawing was

suddenly cast into the deepest shadow. "I am going out soon,—if you do not want me."

"No ;—You have not managed this as well as might be. Do you not see these hills are much too dark, and this stone in the foreground might be made of moss?"

Beatrice looked, and saw that it *was* true ; but she did not the more thank her mother for dissolving her day-dreams, and exercising such keen discrimination with regard to the defects of her performance.

"It is always the same!" she thought. "My mother finds out faults in everything, much sooner than she discovers perfections, and *expects* so much, that it is impossible she ever should be satisfied. Just so did she discourage me, even when I was a child!—I see," she added aloud, "but I don't know how to alter them,—unless you show me."

And she offered to rise, and lend her mother the brush.

"Nay," said Mrs. Mordaunt, looking half displeased, "I only tell you what I really

think. But I must be more careful in future, for I find you do not like unpalatable truths."

"You misunderstand me. I am glad to hear them; but I don't know how to mend my faults, without assistance. Mamma, you used to draw, and I only wish that you would show me—"

But she stopped short, for her mother was not listening; having moved onward to the other end of the room; where, after casting a few more nervous glances around her, she sat down, according to custom, with a book.

Beatrice coloured violently; a sudden passion seized upon her; and without a moment's hesitation, she dashed her brush,—laden with dark colour,—through her drawing; thus, in one instant effacing the work of many hours; for she had applied herself to it for several mornings past. Just as she paused to take breath after her exertions, and was with savage satisfaction contemplating the work of destruction, the door opened to admit Reginald

Mrs. Mordaunt had a real affection for Reginald,—so strong, indeed, as to inspire certain vague hopes with regard to him and Beatrice,—and her pale, melancholy face was lighted up with pleasure, as she threw aside her book, exclaiming :

“ So, sir, you have really condescended to come in at last !”

“ Yes ; to inveigle you to Stapleton. My mother sends all sorts of messages,—which I cannot remember ; but the drift of them is, that she is desirous to see you, so that if you do not come to her, she intends to visit you this afternoon. Will you come to luncheon ?”

Mrs. Mordaunt hesitated, pressed her hand to her forehead, glanced at Beatrice, half declined the invitation, but was finally persuaded that it would do her good ; Beatrice all the time chafing with impatience because she had no opportunity of making any private enquiries about Arthur.

Her mother's next words did not exercise a soothing influence.

"How is poor Arthur?" she enquired, in a tone which jarred upon her daughter's feelings; for the latter fancied (perhaps without reason) that his weaknesses of mind and body met with too much pity, whilst his nobler qualities were overlooked. Reginald shook his head.

"I fear I cannot give a very good account; but I suppose the change from cold to heat is very trying to all delicate constitutions. Do you not find it the case?"

"*Something* has given me dreadful headaches;—made me feel quite ill of late," was the answer. "But we will not keep you waiting. Come, Beatrice, and get your hat and cloak. Never mind laying aside your drawing-box and frame."

Beatrice would still have lingered; but as her mother waited for her, she was obliged to go at once; hastening back, however, almost immediately,—to find Reginald standing before her morning's work, which he was regard-

ing with a puzzled air. He looked up as she rejoined him.

“Why, Beatrice, what *have* you been about?”

She coloured deeply, and half turned away ; being seized with a sudden fit of shame.

“Oh!—You had no business to touch it without leave.—It is quite spoiled, I think,—and I am going to throw it in the fire.”

She stretched forth her hand to tear it from the frame, but Reginald prevented her.

“No : wait a little. Something might yet be done. Let Arthur—”

“Do not mention it to Arthur ! I do not wish my failures known to *him* !”

“Very well ; I will not, if you do not wish it. But, my dearest Beatrice, don’t be so violent. You really frighten me.”

“Do not tease me then ; for I *am* angry ;—though not with *you*.”

He smiled.

“I am relieved to hear *that*. But,—just tell me how this happened.”

"I did it on purpose,—because I was annoyed," said Beatrice, defiantly.

Reginald looked at her with an air of absolute incredulity.

"You *did*?" he at length exclaimed. "Why, Beatrice, I could not have believed you were so foolish."

She coloured still more violently; but resolved to brave it out.

"You do not know the provocation I received; and—I would not give anything for a person who could not occasionally go into a passion."

"Hum!" he answered, slightly elevating his eyebrows. "Indeed! you think it rather praiseworthy, than otherwise? But I beg to differ from you *there*; for *I* would not give much for any person who could not *control* their temper—even under provocation."

"Oh! I stand rebuked!" said Beatrice, half laughing, half annoyed.

"I suppose you think *I* have no right to lecture you," began Reginald; but at this

point Mrs. Mordaunt entered, and Beatrice hastily concealed her drawing, whispering :—

“Hush ! not a word about it before mamma. You know, Reginald, you may say anything you please, but not just now.”

“And you are penitent, then ?” he asked, in the same low tone.

She hesitated for a moment, and then, slightly nodding, turned to take her lilies out of water.

“If you are not quite tired, perhaps you will wait another minute for me,” said Mrs. Mordaunt, once more leaving the room, to give a message to one of the servants.

Beatrice took advantage of this second *tête-à-tête*, to say :—

“You can guess who these are for ? Look, are they not pretty ?”

“Very. They are meant for Arthur ?”

“For a peace-offering. How is he ?”

“In a less impracticable mood. He wants to see you.”

“Did he say so?” she enquired, with eagerness.

“Not in so many words; but he enquired whether I was coming here, and gave me some plain hints to that effect.”

“Strange creature! I shall never understand him.”

“No; nor any body else,” said Reginald, just as their conference was once more disturbed.

They set out, Mrs. Mordaunt being in much better spirits than before; and Beatrice, feeling sorry for her passionate behaviour, being particularly dutiful and gentle, so that the walk seemed neither long nor wearisome.

Mrs. Wilton and Arthur were waiting for them in the garden; the former looking so quietly contented, and so pleased to see her old friend, that the unhappy wife felt at the same time pained by the vast difference in their lot, and yet impelled to seek solace by confiding all her troubles to one who had ever been steadfast in her friendship; and who, if she

herself was satisfied, could nevertheless feel sympathy and interest in the cares and disappointments of another. They embraced warmly; and as soon as the young people left them to themselves, Mrs. Mordaunt suffered herself to be disburdened of the story of her troubles: saying anxiously:—

“I am so grieved about poor Beatrice. She has no companion, save myself, who am but a dreary one at best—and all this is such sad work for her, poor child !”

“She must come here often,” was the earnest answer. “*You* must bring her; it would be far better for you, than shutting yourself up so much alone—and doing *me* a kindness too !”

Mrs. Mordaunt smiled incredulously.

“*You*, my dear Alice ! You are happy—so you cannot miss me.”

“I do indeed; and wish I could persuade you so. I am certainly blessed in having a kind, good husband; and the boys are all that I could desire,” returned Mrs. Wilton,

ignoring the existence of any shade of trouble or anxiety upon their account. "But that is no reason why I should forget old friends, or cease to wish for their society. How I should rejoice to see you looking better!"

A mournful shake of the head was the sole answer. And thus the two ladies talked on; whilst Beatrice and her companions found much to say of equal interest to themselves. Arthur looked so handsome, as he rose to receive her with a pleased, but rather conscious air, that the first glance at him was quite reviving; and Beatrice was once more happy for the moment—all past sufferings vanishing before the all-powerful spell of the present.

"I have brought you these," she said; and eagerly he took the lilies from her, saying in a low tone:

"You are too good. I do not deserve such kindness."

"Too good, am I?" was her laughing answer. "Reginald has just been telling me

another story ; putting me to shame by pointing out my imperfections."

"Very kind of him," returned Arthur, in the same playful manner, "but he had better turn his attention to his own."

Beatrice glanced triumphantly at Reginald, who was ready enough to fall in with the gay humour of the other two ; and many a light laugh broke the silence as they wandered lazily about the gardens. But, presently, when Arthur and Beatrice found themselves alone for a short time, sitting on the sunny steps of a terrace, the conversation took a graver turn ; though, all painful subjects being by common consent avoided, it was even more interesting to both. Arthur's restless look had passed away ; he *seemed*, and his companion *felt* that she was happy ; and later in the afternoon he bade her sing to him—solemn or soothing strains, such as he loved best—to the great organ in the hall.

She played and sang with deep feeling, and

it was always one of his greatest pleasures to listen to her; seated with his eyes bent upon the chequered pavement, and beneath the subdued light from a window of stained glass; rich tints hovering over him, and making his peculiarly delicate cast of countenance appear full of spiritual repose and beauty—even more beautiful than those of which he dreamed, and which he vainly strove to immortalise on canvass.

The deep, melodious sounds rolled on in waves of harmony; they swelled through the hall, and woke his soul to high, enthusiastic feelings, such as music—grand, powerful music can alone create—strains called into life by a skilful, loving hand.

Both felt happier and *better* when they left the hall; Arthur following his companion's every movement and change of countenance, with eyes bent only on discovering perfections; and after her departure, he returned to his St. Michael with new hope, and a clearer

view of the exalted nature of the subject. Nor was he so grievously disappointed as he generally was; the glorious image in his mind seeming for once reflected from the unfinished picture on the easel.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS, AND THEIR EFFECT.

What dangerous action, stood it next to death,
Would I not undergo for one calm look ?
O, 'tis the curse in love, and still approved,
When women cannot love where they're beloved.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

For a short time afterwards, there was peace at Stapleton. The grand picture made some progress, and excited higher hopes than any former effort; Arthur was less restless, and Beatrice contented with this improvement. Mrs. Wilton—too often wearied with her endeavours to soothe the wayward humours of her step-son, to heal the constant misunderstandings which arose between him and his

father, and to comfort Mrs. Mordaunt, was well-pleased to see the change, and began to project a little scheme of gaiety. She fancied that the young people found their home too gloomy, and that it affected both temper and spirits; therefore, it appeared to her that a *fête* would rouse, and do them good. The pretext was a treat to the school-children, to be given on her birth day; but those of a higher class who were bidden to witness it, were afterwards to be rewarded with a ball.

Mr. Wilton's consent was obtained; invitations issued; preparations made; and finally, the eventful day arrived. Beatrice, ever eager for enjoyment, looked forward to it; telling Reginald in confidence that let the rest of her life be what it would, she was determined that those few hours should be happy ones. He laughed, and answered that *he* was quite prepared to do his utmost in aiding them to pass pleasantly, upon condition that she would look her best.

“Impertinent! But what does Arthur

think about it?" she enquired. "I mean, what is his *private* opinion on the subject; for of course he told me that he thought it a very agreeable scheme, as we all wanted stirring up a little."

"Ah, he does not condescend to take much interest in it; but *I* really think that *he* (whatever the rest may require), wants rousing. Anything to turn his thoughts into a livelier channel."

"There is only one drawback.—He does not dance."

"No, poor fellow, his lameness quite prevents that; but we must look after him, and try to provide him with some amusement. There will be all our friends and acquaintance congregated to do honour to the great occasion, and surely he may extract some amusement out of *them*;—either by means of conversation or by watching their doings. I always find that sufficiently entertaining."

"Then," said Beatrice, playfully, "if you care so little about it, I need not trouble mv-

self to dance with *you* ; for there will doubtless be many anxious competitors for that honour."

"Indeed ; if you do *not*," was the answer, "we shall never ask you to another ball ; so remember, Miss, that I shall expect you to dance with me the very first,—and *last*, too, if it suits me. *Au revoir*."

The day was fortunately very fine, so that the out-door part of the entertainment passed off satisfactorily ; Arthur looking as if he were less bored than he had ventured to expect ; and moving gracefully and quietly amongst the assembled guests ; winning favour in the eyes of a few of the most thoughtful, whilst his brother, gayer, and more strikingly handsome, in manners and appearance, gained far more general approbation. Beatrice, all animation, divided her attention equally between the two, yet found time also to indulge in various small flirtations, into which she was tempted by the universal homage she received. She looked radiant ; her eyes sparkling, and

her fine figure set off by the coolest and most elegant of muslin dresses. The rich, warm colour mantled in her cheeks, and her laugh rang gaily as she flitted to and fro,—the admiration, or envy of everybody present. Arthur's eyes followed her with the most intense earnestness; he coveted every word bestowed on others, he endeavoured to keep near her, and when she approached him of her own accord, his pulses quickened, and he permitted himself to sink into a dreamy state of ecstasy.

“And oh!” he thought, “that this could last for ever; for this is happiness;—a green oasis in the desert!”

The sun went down; the children were dismissed; the guests refreshed themselves with an unformal repast; the musicians followed their example; then lights glittered along the front of the old house, fresh carriages drove up, gay strains resounded from the ball room, and the grand business of the evening commenced. Everywhere there were lovely

flowers ; in wreaths, in vases, and on stands ; all the chief rooms, and even the celebrated gallery, were lighted and thrown open, forming a brilliant and attractive spectacle. In short, every facility for enjoyment was afforded, and the guests appeared resolved to make the most of the whole entertainment. Mrs. Wilton, quiet, graceful, and still beautiful, exerted herself to give contentment to the whole assemblage, and it was universally agreed that she could not have done more. Her husband, with more conscious superiority, seconded her efforts ; feeling anxious for *her* sake, that all should pass off well ; the boys did him no discredit, and he looked upon *both* of them with pride ; for he must have been blind indeed not to have seen how far they were before all ordinary young men. He glanced *quite* approvingly at Arthur, whose manners in society could not have been improved, and spoke to him so kindly that his son felt really happy. With Reginald, he was always satisfied ; and now he felt tri-

umphant, as he looked from him to others of the same age,—making reflections much to the detriment of the latter.

“And now, Beatrice,” said Reginald, “I claim your promise.”

“*My* promise, indeed! *You* made it for me, for I said I would *not* dance with you. However, as you waltz tolerably, I shall for once change my mind; but you don’t know what disappointment that announcement has already given, or you would look as though you had a higher appreciation of the honour.”

“It is *you* who are honoured by *my* preference,” he answered, leading her away. “This is not a waltz, though, but a quadrille. I hope you will comport yourself with due propriety: for being *my* partner, it is of consequence to both. Don’t you see how everyone is watching *me*?”

She made some laughing answer, and looked round with satisfaction, for they were really the objects of most flattering attention; all the young ladies envying her success, and

present proud position, whilst the youthful members of the other sex cast jealous and indignant looks towards Reginald, and longing, lingering ones upon herself.

“What business has *he* to monopolise her?” murmured more than one of her admirers. “I shall not stand this much longer. He has been keeping her to himself all day,—but *my* turn *shall* come, or I’ll know the reason.”

“Look at Miss Mordaunt,” whispered her fair rivals, “she *looks* triumphant, and I am sure she *feels* secure. But it will not succeed. She is much too forward; quite too much of a coquette, and *that*, you must acknowledge, seldom answers in the end. But is not he handsome? And he dances beautifully! He is so charming when one gets a chance of talking to him,—which is not too often. But he cannot dance with her all the evening,—what a pity that his brother cannot dance, too! I like him excessively; his manners are so graceful, and (when he pleases) he can pay one such delicate attentions! He is proud,

however, and not too accessible; but that makes one value his civilities all the more."

"And he is the elder brother," thought the prudent matrons who had daughters to establish; and in whose eyes that circumstance alone would have atoned for a multitude of sins. "It is a pity, though, that Reginald is not in his place,—but I understand that in point of fortune, neither of them is to be despised. Mr. Wilton will take good care that his favourite son is well provided for."

So spoke and reflected envy, jealousy, and prudence: the objects of their attention being, meanwhile, either indifferent to, or unconscious of their remarks;—Reginald and Beatrice entering heartily into the enjoyments of the evening; whilst Arthur, weary and giddy with the exertions and excitement of the day, sat alone, and in silence—a mere looker-on! His spirits had sunk, and to him the whole affair now seemed dull and unmeaning; though had he analysed his feelings he might have discovered, that the impossibility of actively

participating in the amusements of the evening, was the chief reason why they seemed so wearisome.

In his secret heart he envied Reginald, and would have given anything to occupy his place, for it was a sore trial to see him and Beatrice so happy in each other's company, whilst he, who cared more for her than any other being, appeared forgotten. He saw her floating past him in a rapid waltz, her white dress even touching him as she was borne along; he heard her clear, eager tones, and tried to catch their sense; nay, sometimes she recollected him sufficiently to greet him with a passing word or smile; but what were they, compared with the expressive glances and unceasing flow of words bestowed on Reginald? Why did she seem so pleased to be with him? Was it because—could it be possible that she loved his younger brother? It was possible, and moreover, probable; therefore, adieu, hope! It was not for him to dream of happiness.

He leaned back in an attitude of deep dejection; looking so pale and worn out, that Beatrice herself observed it, and pausing to speak to him, said gently :

“ You are tired, Arthur, and have no business to stay here any longer. Why do you not go somewhere where you could lie down and rest ?”

His fancies with regard to her and Reginald, and his mistaken notion of being overlooked, made him irritable and unreasonable. Consequently, he darted a sudden, sharp, suspicious look at her, inquiring :

“ Do you want me to go? Am I in your way? I fancied I was very inoffensive.”

“ In *my* way? Oh, what nonsense! What should make you thing so? But you do not think so; it is only your old way of speaking, for you must know that it is only for your own sake that I advise your going.”

“ I don't feel too sure of anything.”

“ Nor I,—except that you really grow more and more incomprehensible. But if you do

not want to go, I shall sit down and talk to you a little,—try to amuse you, if I can.”

“Amusement! As if I were a peevish child that wanted soothing.”

“Well, I think you are, in conduct,” was the answer.

Arthur coloured with anger.

“Thank you, I am glad I know your real opinion at last! It may save me from some most unpleasant mistakes.”

“Oh, Arthur, don’t misunderstand me!” pleaded Beatrice: but he continued in the same tone:

“No: I understand you now, and assure you I am most grateful for your kindness in enlightening me. Pray do not stay here. Indeed I will not allow it,—though, all the same I am much obliged to you for your kind design of humouring me.”

Beatrice listened in amazement, for her conscience acquitted her of any sin towards him; and she was also uneasy upon his own account, for it seemed probable that his vehe-

ment excitement might make him seriously ill ; yet she scarce knew what to say, for every word—however innocent it might appear to her—had but the effect of rendering him still more excited.

“Arthur,” she entreated, “let me stay here.”

He would not meet her eyes ; replying, as he half turned from her :

“Certainly,—if you think proper.”

“Don’t be angry. What have I done?”

“No-one said you had done anything—more than usual.”

“Then—”

“Excuse me ; for I am far too much fatigued to talk. I should think you would find more entertainment, if you went on dancing, instead of sitting here.”

“I prefer it, and do not mean to go.”

“Then *I* will leave my place for *Reginald*,” said Arthur, pointedly, and rising as he spoke.

Beatrice’s entreaties were totally disre-

garded; he persisted in departing; and she could only watch him with eyes to which tears of sorrow, not unmixed with resentment, had already risen. Whilst she was still gazing after his retreating figure, Reginald approached.

“Why, Beatrice, what has happened? Not another quarrel?”

“I don’t know what to call it,” was her despondent answer. “Arthur seems so strangely capricious in his manner towards me. Angry without apparent reason,—for I never can discover my offence. I am very unfortunate! Can *you* guess the reason of this sudden change?”

“Indeed, I cannot. Arthur is a puzzle. Poor Beatrice, don’t mind about it, for I am sure *you* have done nothing to bring down resentment. Let me console you with another waltz.”

She shook her head.

“No: not now. My gay mood has passed; and—is not the room hot? I am almost suffocating!”

.

“Come away, then, to a cooler spot, and I will get you some refreshment. Ice, or anything you happen to prefer.”

Beatrice assented ; and sitting unnoticed by an open window, amidst fragrant flowers, began to feel a little less dispirited.

Reginald exerted himself to give a more pleasant turn to her thoughts, and it seemed as though he were in some degree successful, for she listened attentively, then smiled, and finally began to answer with animation.

“And now,” he observed, “since you seem rested, perhaps you will like to go back again and dance?”

“No ; let us stay here, for we have the room entirely to ourselves. Such a relief to be alone occasionally !”

“I am quite willing. Let me set that plate down for you. Oh, stay a moment ! Where did you get that ring ?”

“Do you like it ?”

“Yes. Who gave it to you ? Is it new ?

“I have not had it very long ; but you

must have seen it before. Mamma gave it to me on my birthday."

"I never noticed it. Just take it off, and show it to me."

Beatrice complied; and Reginald turned the ring round upon the tip of his little finger, admiring it.

"I am glad you think it pretty. And now suppose by way of variety, we go on into the next room. How nice it is to have so many rooms communicating with each other! This is such a delightful old house," exclaimed the former, rising, and adding, as she approached the door of the adjoining apartment: "But I want my ring."

"Here it is," was the answer, as Reginald, stopping short in the door-way, took her hand. "Which is the proper finger?—The *engaged* finger;—I intend to put it *there*."

Beatrice laughed, and drew her hand away.

"Reginald! How can you be so silly? What if anybody heard you?"

"They would only think that I was very

fortunate.—Here,” (taking her hand again), “just let me put this in its proper place.”

“There! You have fairly compromised yourself!” exclaimed Beatrice, jestingly. “Perhaps you are not aware that in Scotland, it would be dangerous to do what you have done?”

“But,” returned Reginald, in the same strain, “since there are no witnesses, I might deny the betrothal. And besides, I did not say the fatal words, ‘I take you for, &c.’ so you *could* have no hold over me.”

“How prudent not to finish that little formula! It might prove binding, if you happened to be overheard.”

“Hush, Beatrice; we shall be, if you are not careful, and then we should furnish the gossips with a nice new story.”

“Should we not?” she cried, laughing still more merrily. “Mrs. Wheeldon’s face would be a perfect picture! What if she should surprise us in the midst of such an interesting conference?”

Reginald gave a shudder at the mention of this lady, who was one of the most arrant scandal-mongers in the neighbourhood.

“Then, indeed, it would be all over with us both.”

“Oh, I should put a good face upon the matter ; and if pressed closely, should look mysterious and say we were both so young that *it* was not to be at present ; so I hoped she would keep it *quite* a secret.”

This answer provoked a sudden peal of laughter ; in the midst of which the pair advanced into the inner room ; Reginald exclaiming :

“Not *at present* ! No ; I think we had better take a little time, before we do that which never can be undone. Don’t you agree with me, *ma belle fiancée* ?”

“Quite. But how foolish we both are !” answered Beatrice, pausing to take breath, and looking around the apartment, as she added : “Are you *sure* that we are quite alone ?”

"It appears so,"—Reginald began; but ere he could finish, his brother started forward from the window.

Both Beatrice and her companion, thus taken by surprise, drew back in as much confusion as though they had been guilty of some crime. Arthur had seen the ring restored, and catching the general outline of their conversation without comprehending it, he fell into the very misapprehension which had been the subject of the latter part. It appeared to him, that the scene which he witnessed, was the sequel of a real betrothal; and their levity of manner, even, did not deceive him; adding instead to his agony of mind. His brow darkened, and he shook from head to foot, as he stood before them with a face of ashen paleness; trying to say calmly :

"No! You are *not* alone. Unfortunately, or in *my* opinion, *fortunately*, I have overheard all,—and I am glad I know the worst. But do not fear:—I will not betray your secret."

Beatrice became almost as pale as he was, when she encountered the lurid light of his eye ; and his words sounded like a presage of misfortune. She gasped for breath, and struggling to speak intelligibly :

“ Arthur,” she cried, “ you are mistaken. We were only joking.”

“ Joking !” he answered, passionately. “ What is sport to you—”

“ Oh, Arthur ! Arthur ! Only hear me ! Reginald, speak for me,” exclaimed poor Beatrice, in despair.

“ It is needless. I already understand—the *truth* !” was Arthur’s still more vehement reply ; and he was going to say more, when something seemed to suffocate him ; he stretched forth his hand, as as if to save himself from falling ; then suddenly pressing his handkerchief to his lips, Beatrice perceived with terror, that it was stained with crimson.

“ Reginald !” she almost shrieked, “ support him !” .

Her words were needless, for Reginald had

already sprung forward, just in time to save him from falling; feeling Arthur weigh more and more heavily upon him, as he sank into a state of insensibility. Reginald grew white with fear, looking to Beatrice for aid, and feeling as though this catastrophe could not indeed be a reality. He sank upon one knee, the better to support his brother, till assistance should arrive.

“Beatrice! For Heaven’s sake call some one;—but not my mother. Do not let her be alarmed.”

“No, Reginald, I will not—*dare* not leave *him*! *You* go. Let me take your place,” she cried, kneeling beside him, and insisting upon supporting Arthur in *her* arms, which were clasped tenderly, though firmly round him. “Lose no time!” she continued. “Arthur, will you not look up, if only to tell me that you are not angry?”

But her words fell upon unheeding ears; and urged on by intensity of terror, she re-

doubled her entreaties, pressing her lips passionately upon his cold forehead; her wild words and actions being the last definite impressions which Reginald's eyes and ears received, ere he sped rapidly upon his way.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DESIRED MEETING.

But through the heart
Should jealousy its venom once diffuse,
'Tis then delightful misery no more,
But agony unmixed, incessant gall,
Corroding every thought, and blasting all
Love's paradise. Ye fairy prospects, then,
Ye beds of roses, and ye bowers of joy,
Farewell ! Ye gleamings of departed peace,
Shine out your last ! The yellow tinging plague
Internal vision taints, and in a night
Of livid gloom imagination wraps.

THOMPSON.

MANY days—during which Arthur's state was most precarious,—passed over before Beatrice was permitted to see him again ; although she haunted Stapleton, in the hope of a summons to his presence. Many a time was she upon the point of confessing her love, and entreat-

ing permission to be with him, and wait upon him; but she restrained herself; only watching with trembling eagerness for every fresh account, and hoping, though vainly, that he might have asked for *her*.

He seemed perfectly passive, and never asked for any one; and as the strictest quiet was essential to his recovery, Mrs. Wilton, steadily defended his room from all intruders; Reginald alone being permitted to share her labours and vigils, whilst even his father was only allowed to enter occasionally for a few moments, and then, scarcely to speak. It is true that the sound of a step without sometimes caused Arthur to turn his eyes wistfully towards the door; though the agitation which he experienced at such times, convinced him that his mother was but following the dictates of prudence, in keeping him from all exciting interviews. It would have been impossible for him to see Beatrice without violent emotion; and habitual reserve rendered him unwilling to betray his real feelings to one who

looked upon him with indifference; for he was now firmly convinced that, though they might not yet have entered into any engagement, Beatrice and Reginald were attached to, and thoroughly understood each other.

“Well, be it so!” he said, inwardly. “They,—so full of life, and hope, and energy,—are well suited to each other; whilst *I* have nearly done with this world and its miserable delusions. Love and happiness are not for such as I; but I shall surely find rest elsewhere. Why should I envy *them*, or seek to bind Beatrice to one whose misfortunes would fall like a blight upon the beauty and vigour of her youth? *I was* mad, or intoxicated with vain hopes; but the approach of death exerts a sobering influence, and I can view the subject rationally *now*. Am I jealous of Reginald? Do I hate my brother for winning the prize for which I would have died? God forbid! It was but natural that he should love her,—that they two should love each other,—and they little guessed the agony *I*

endured! God bless them! And to Him be praise, that I can still love, and wish them both all happiness! The future—the life beyond the grave,—shall, from henceforth alone occupy *my* thoughts!”

Such was the general tenor of his meditations; and though he followed Reginald with an enquiring glance, he not only did not refuse his brother's services, but accepted them with affectionate gratitude.

And meanwhile, Beatrice, whose secret was known to Reginald alone, waited day by day, and week by week, with pale cheek, and sickening anxiety, for the last news from Arthur's room; remembering the terrible moment, when forgetting all conventional restraints, she had clasped him to her heart, kissed his cold forehead, and poured forth, to unheeding ears, the story of her love.

“Oh, Reginald, has he never mentioned me?” she cried, at last.

He hesitated.

“He has scarcely spoken.—It has been for-

bidden ; but I believe that he is out of danger now."

"Thank heaven ! I think I understand," with quivering lip ; for her strength and fortitude were giving way. All through those joyous summer days ; those long, calm evenings, when the voice of nature tells us that the lavish beauty, the harmony, and repose, which appeal so powerfully to our hearts, are but a foretaste of more perfect and enduring pleasures, had she watched and waited, feeling as if the glory spread on every side, were mocking her by its contrast to the dull despondency which reigned within her breast. Her eyes turned wistfully to Reginald, to prefer the request which her lips dared not frame. Apparently he understood her, for he answered :

"You desire to see him ? I will enquire whether it is possible."

"Thank you. I will be very quiet. I will not even speak without permission."

Reginald turned from the anxious, pleading

countenance before him, to confer with his mother ; who, after some demur, consented to ask Arthur whether he felt equal to the meeting.

She saw his calm, and almost listless air, at once replaced by one of violent agitation, and regretted that she had been beguiled into disturbing his tranquillity.

“Nay, Arthur, it would be too much for you. I can see it plainly ; therefore, think no more about it ; but keep quiet,” she entreated.

He struggled for composure.

“Mother ;—I never asked,—but now that you yourself have mentioned it,—I feel that I desire to see her. Has she—ever asked for me?”

“Often and often. She has been here constantly.”

“She has ? And I was kept in ignorance !”

He spoke vehemently ; almost starting from his sofa ; and his mother answered, with evident uneasiness :

“It was necessary. You were not in a fit state to see any one,—undergo any excitement. Even at this moment, you are so much agitated, that I regret having mentioned the subject now.”

Arthur sank back upon the sofa.

“You shall see how calm I will be. Only let her come for a few minutes, for it would be far worse *not* to see her, after it has been once suggested.”

It was vain to entreat him to defer the meeting till another day; and at length Beatrice was permitted to enter the half-darkened dressing room, where he was lying; but no sooner did she obtain a glimpse of his pale countenance, and shadowy form, than her boasted powers of endurance failed, and she suddenly burst into a violent fit of tears. Arthur himself was utterly unnerved by this unexpected demonstration; and with his features working convulsively, appeared upon the point of rising, when his mother signed to Reginald to take her place, whilst she

gently, but determinedly, at once led Beatrice from the room.

Arthur looked after them without a word; then, closing his eyes, lay perfectly still; keeping his thoughts, whatever they might be, a secret; nor dared Reginald renew his agitation by any allusion to what had happened.

But, half an hour afterwards, Mrs. Wilton and Beatrice returned; the latter with eyes red and swollen with weeping; and the former, leading her towards Arthur, said:

“You must not speak. I guessed how it would be. The recollection of—” she paused and commenced another sentence: “The knowledge of all that you had suffered,—you, her old playfellow, of whom she always was so fond,—was too much for her feelings, and she could not help giving way. She must not stay now, longer than to ask, and convince herself that you are really better.”

Arthur smiled faintly, and looking towards her for a moment, stretched out a thin and trembling hand; his mother’s words—“her

old playfellow," seeming intended to remind him, that he must not regard her in any other light.

"I am indeed,—much better. But *you* look far from well. I am sorry to have distressed you;—and I fear I frightened you *that evening*."

She had taken his weak, burning hand, and longed passionately to press it to her lips and heart. Had they been alone, she would have shaken off all restraint; but, (and perhaps fortunately, for even sudden happiness might have been fatal to the hapless Arthur,) the presence of Mrs. Wilton and Reginald proved a check. She only held his hand closely, and drawing nearer, whispered:

"Ah, that wretched evening!—Tell me,—are we friends?"

His hand returned the pressure of her own.

"You cannot doubt it. Beatrice, you must forgive me before I die."

She started, and gazed at him in terror; exclaiming aloud:

“Oh, Arthur, do not talk so! You *are* better! You are out of danger *now*!”

“So they tell me; but I feel so weak, that I cannot tell whether it is really true. The danger may be over for the *present*, but who knows how long this false security may last? However that may be, though, I shall be contented; and if—that of which I speak, should be at hand, let no-one grieve, for to *me* it will be a relief,—a blessed escape from suffering. Oh, Beatrice, you cannot understand my feelings. *You*, who have never seen death closely, never felt his near approach, cannot realise what *I* feel, who have lately met him face to face,—who have lain looking day by day into Eternity! I *know* that our Father will be merciful; therefore I wait my summons without fear; and it were best thus, or I am safe *now*; whereas, if I live on, who can tell what trials and temptations are in store?—”

He paused, exhausted; and Beatrice felt a deep awe stealing over her; prevailing over

all more passionate and personal emotions. She could only keep her eyes fixed earnestly upon him, whilst she forced herself to say :

“ God’s will be done !”

There was no time for further intercourse, for Mrs. Wilton again anxiously approached, and insisted upon leading her away.

“ So soon !”

“ Yes ; go,” said Arthur, faintly. “ It were better for us both.”

“ You are right. I will.” And yet she lingered ; some desire appearing to be struggling for fulfilment ; but she checked it, and bestowing a parting kiss upon his thin, transparent hand, said in a low tone :

“ God bless you !”

Then she forced herself away : and well was it that she had not yielded to that inward impulse which had prompted her to touch his forehead with her lips ; for, as it was, he started, and a sudden tremor shook him, even when they touched his hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

BY THE SEA.

Break, break, break,

At the foot of thy crags, O sea!

- But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

TENNYSON.

DREARY is the first awakening from the joyous hopeful security of youth ; harsh the first lessons taught by sorrow ; and terrible the first glimpse of death ; coming in the midst of gay indifference, and eager projects,—like an earthquake or tornado suddenly bursting upon a lovely, smiling country, and at once changing the whole aspect of the landscape into gloom and desolation. We hear sermons

upon the shortness and vanity of life ; we have proofs of it even in the fading flower and withering leaf ;—in the new graves in the church-yard, and the old faces vanishing from our sight ; but until it is brought *home* to us, we do not feel the true import of the awful truth ;—that the world is passing from us, and we gliding onwards toward another and more enduring life.

Beatrice could as yet scarce realise this, though her interview with Arthur had inspired her with vague dread. She was filled with agony at the thought of losing him ; all the sunshine of her life seemed suddenly eclipsed, and nothing left to her for the future save a dreary void ; and yet she could not believe it possible that he, so young, so beautiful, so gifted—and so loved, could die ! That he must leave her,—not for a brief space, but, (speaking humanly), for ever !—For ever upon earth ; and as yet she had not strength to dwell upon the unknown *afterwards* ; that thought appearing terrible, rather than blissful. Still,

however, this first deep sorrow was productive of good, by teaching her to reflect seriously upon matters of such high importance, and to pray more earnestly than she had ever done before.

Some time elapsed before she was permitted to see Arthnr again; and then both of them contrived to seem more calm. He was out for the first time; reclining amidst cushions on a shady seat, with his mother and Reginald in close attendance; and almost the first news that Beatrice heard was that they proposed taking him to the sea. He himself appeared to look forward with some degree of pleasure to the change, though he was far too weak and languid to take much interest in anything; permitting them to do with him what they would.

A sudden scheme suggested itself to Beatrice; replacing the momentary feeling of dismay with which she had received the intelligence that Arthur was to be removed beyond her reach. She hastened home, and casting

from her every consideration except the one that she *must* gain her point, she entreated her mother to make arrangements for joining the Wiltons at their destination.

“Mamma, do try to manage it,” she pleaded, with unwonted earnestness. “I know it would be such a comfort to Mrs. Wilton to have *you* near; and to *me*, it would be a still greater one to be able to look after—Reginald. I know he likes to have me *at* hand to help him, and to talk to him about his brother.”

These arguments had some weight with Mrs. Mordaunt, who replied, less coldly than usual :

“I am willing,—provided you will undertake your father.”

Beatrice would have undertaken anything to obtain an end so much to be desired; and she attacked Mr. Mordaunt so energetically that he was finally compelled to yield; informing her that she and her mother were at liberty to absent themselves for a month,

whilst he himself should probably remain at home ;—an arrangement which was likely to suit all parties best !

The beautiful scenery, and bracing air,—fresh, but not too keen,—of one of the finest watering places upon the north-eastern coast, appeared to restore to Arthur some degree of strength and spirit, and he was soon able, not only to take drives, but to walk, and even attempt to sketch a little. The steep rocky hill which sheltered the town upon the north, surmounted by the ruins of a castle, whose dilapidated grey walls bore testimony that the cannon of the Protector had visited that neighbourhood ; the wide bay with its numerous headlands, stretching, one beyond the other far into the sea, until the last seemed but a faint blue outline, with a reef of rocks, over which the chafed waters leaped in foam, at the extremity ; and inland, the picturesque Mount, crowned with dark fir trees, whilst its sides were clad with sunny corn fields ; these afforded subjects no less tempting for a draw-

ing, than the real objects were pleasing to the eye.

Arthur endeavoured to forget his high ambitious aims, St. Michael, his Madonnas, and other grand conceptions of his brain, and to be satisfied with the enjoyment of the present; and above all, difficult though it might be when Beatrice was near him, to forget another and still vainer dream.

Walking, driving, or sailing over the calm summer sea, he contrived never to be alone with her; to lead, or suffer himself to be led into any conversations of absorbing interest; yet without any coldness,—any semblance of avoidance on his part; for latterly his manner had become peculiarly gentle.

Beatrice was disappointed, for she *had* hoped something would arise out of this excursion;—some explanation, at least, if not some confession which might draw them more closely together. But nothing of the kind was proffered, and she found herself, by some imperceptible means, kept outside a barrier

which it was impossible to pass; for if Arthur repelled her confidence, it was not for *her* to thrust it unsolicited upon him; and she was compelled to conceal her feelings, whilst she kept herself in readiness to render him any little service that he might permit, and to grasp at any passing gleam of happiness.

It was a great comfort to Mrs. Wilton to see Arthur, (comparatively speaking), in such improved health, and so well able to amuse himself; but she had been told that though a bracing air was what he required at that warm time of year, a milder climate would be essential in winter; and she accordingly began to think about Torquay.

“As it is considered of importance, I must talk to your father about taking a house there for the cold months,” she observed when speaking to him one day upon the subject.

But Arthur answered with a decision that surprised her:

“No, mother, I must go to Italy; for a different air is far less necessary to me than a

thorough change of scene,—such as cannot be obtained in any part of England.”

“If so, we must endeavour to contrive it. The re-establishment of your health, must ever be the first consideration.”

“But do not mistake me; I must go *alone*.”

“Alone!” cried Mrs. Wilton. “Arthur, you are in no state to undertake a solitary expedition upon such a scale.”

“I must,” was the rather vehement reply. “What I require is, to feel that I am entirely dependent upon my own resources, and have no-one else to look to upon any occasion;—in a word, that I am free to cultivate habits of self-reliance; to make my own plans, and carry them out as I please. I would go with no-one but a servant to attend upon me.”

“Ah! I think I understand. Perfect liberty is what you want; and if it were not for my anxiety about you, I should also say the scheme was good.”

Arthur took his mother's hand, and said very gently:

“Take care that you do not *misunderstand* me. Do not think I wish to shake off all home ties, or that I am insensible to the kindness I have met with. But there are reasons,”—his voice faltered, he paused, and turned his head away, “reasons, and good ones, why I *ought* to go. Therefore, do not question me, dear mother, but consent to let me do so.” Again he paused, and then, half-smiling, looked up quickly: “Perhaps I shall return home a new being. You *may* find me much improved.” He sighed, and added with returning gravity: “At any rate, I cannot be much worse than I am now; so please to think the matter over, and assist me in obtaining my father’s sanction.”

He kissed the hand he held as he concluded, and then turned to leave the room, as if unwilling to enter into farther discussion; his mind feeling relieved now that he had spoken openly upon a subject which he had long been revolving in secret. To leave England,—and Beatrice,—was now his sole desire; and he

resolved to remain in Italy until new scenes and new ideas should have succeeded old-established ones, and either calmed his feelings, or given him strength to overcome them by force.

He felt as though it were already settled, and being settled, had already given him new spirits, so that his dread of trusting himself alone with Beatrice was lessened. He collected his sketching materials, and went down to the sands—alone, walking with unusual briskness until he was far beyond the reach of carriages and horsemen, and the customary crowd of fashionable loungers; then he halted in a quiet spot,—a pleasant nook amongst the rocks, which here projected boldly,—grey and stern, with sunny stretches of smooth sand between. Looking back, the weather-beaten castle-hill still met his eye, with a foreground of lofty cliff, and scattered fragments of rock,—detached in winter storms; on the left hand lay the open sea, divided from him by a dark, low range of seaweed covered ledges, with

bright, silent pools between ; and straight before him a rugged point, with fainter and bluer ones behind it, shut him into a romantic little bay.

He chose the latter as a subject for his morning's sketch, and began his outline ; but very leisurely, for the warmth and fineness of the day, added to the fatigue of scrambling over the rocks, induced a not unpleasant languor, and made him feel more inclined to dream than work. He paused frequently in the intervals of laying on the colours, and at length set down his drawing to dry in the sun, whilst he flung himself lazily upon the sand : drinking in enjoyment from the repose and beauty of the scene, and listening to the low, sighing sound of the waveless sea.

Yes, *enjoyment* ; for the consciousness of self-conquest made his heart feel absolutely light ; and for once he was contented with the present, instead of anxiously looking onward to the future. He could even think of Beatrice without repining ; and whilst wishing

her and Reginald every happiness, forget that he himself was lonely,—disappointed ; though as if to test him, presently a female figure approached round an angle of rock, and seating herself at some slight distance from him, upon a dry, flat stone, turned her face toward the sea, and began a wild, melancholy song. Sweetly were the well-known tones borne towards him, filling his soul with mournful, but scarce painful feelings ; whilst his eyes dwelt fondly on the graceful outline of her form.

“She is beautiful—and more than beautiful,” he sighed. “But I have resolved not to think of her more,—and God forbid that I should change my resolution ! Let me from henceforth think of her only as of a dear sister,—or, if that cannot be, but as a lovely fleeting vision. I am strong, and I will prove it ere I leave this spot.”

Yet he sighed again, as half rising, he took up a pencil and a sheet of paper, and began to write. Still she sat before him, singing, as though unconscious that he was so near, nor

had she moved, when, folding up the paper, he approached her, with a gaiety of manner which had long seemed foreign to his disposition. She started, and the colour flushed into her cheek.

“Arthur! You stole upon me unawares.”

“But I have long been listening to a most delightful—”

“You have actually been within hearing all this time?” she exclaimed, regretting the lost opportunity, and almost unconscious that she interrupted him.

“I have; your song beguiled me from my duty,—the study of nature,—for I could do nothing but lie still and listen. But where did *you* come from, and how came you to be wandering here alone?”

“My mother and Reginald are on yonder, concealed from view by that projecting piece of rock; and I had slipped away from them to amuse myself after my own selfish fashion. There they are,” she added, almost with a

sigh; for already her short *tête-à-tête* was drawing to a close.

He also felt disappointed, for he had intended to seize this opportunity for breaking to her the news of his projected flight,—perhaps with the design of observing how she received the information; but that scheme was now of course impracticable, so he merely said:

“I will collect my sketching things, and return, that we may walk home together. In the meantime—see what folly your sweet singing led me into!”

And placing the piece of folded paper in her hand, he returned to his nook amongst the rocks; leaving her to investigate its contents at leisure. She watched him for a moment,—a vague hope taking possession of her,—and then, opening the paper, she read with some surprise the following lines:

•
THE SIREN.

Between the ocean and the land
Lay a broad stretch of yellow sand;

And where the waves had noiselessly
Stol'n back, the wanderer might espy
Sea treasures,—tangled mermaid's hair,
Stones, in the sunlight glittering fair,
And wreathèd shells, and weeds that lay
Like a soft fringe around the bay,
Mingled of crimson, purple, green,
And crossed with threads of varying sheen,
As tho' some spirit-hand, self-taught
In ocean-caves the work had wrought.
Strange fitful lights and shadows fell
On many a crystal, rock-girt well,
Where countless living creatures slept,
Or forth from weedy harbour crept.
There streamed long sea-plants, floating wide,
There, left by the receding tide
Lay rosy star-fish ; and a bower
Thick-blooming with that living flower—
The ruddy sea-anemone,
Welcomed the waters lovingly.
Transparent globes were scattered round
Like fallen stars, upon a ground
Of sand that shone like silver flame,
Wet with the wave's cool touch.—There came
A low, soft sigh of ecstasy,
As tho' some spirit floated nigh,
Borne on the air, from where the blue
And silent waters, backward drew.
How hushed—how glorious was the scene !
Tide-rocks o'ergrown with richest green,
Smooth sands, clear pools, and cliffs that rose
To meet a glowing sky.—Repose
And beauty blessed both sea and land,—
The glittering waves, the level strand.
Happy, thrice happy, was the hour

In which, enthralled by subtle power
Of radiant colours, life, and light,
Stole over me a deep delight,
Such as a heavenly dream, which fills
The soul with love and hope, instils.
Alone I seemed,—yet not alone,
For suddenly a liquid tone,
Melodious, pure, as tho' it stole
From sighing waves, thrilled thro' my soul.
Whence the sweet sounds that rose and fell,
As rose and sank the noiseless swell
Of ocean? Notes of harmony,
That float on air; now rising high;
Now slowly dying,—till o'er all
The scene doth witching stillness fall.
Whence those enrapturing strains? I sought
Their source, and lo! a figure caught
My wandering glance, on rocky ledge,
Just on the gleaming water's edge,
Reclining,—genius in her eye,
And on her lips sweet minstrelsy.
Green was her robe, and brown her hair,
Her face and form divinely fair,
And on the ocean's heaving breast
I deemed she might securely rest,—
A creature, born of sun and wave,—
A Siren risen from secret cave.
My heart beat wildly: "Were I free,
"Fair temptress, I would offer thee
My love, my life. But know, this soul
Owns nobler, holier control.
Whisper *her* name, and echoed wide,
The winds will bear it o'er the tide.
That name is—Beatrice!"—Up rose
The stranger maid from calm repose;—

No dweller of the treacherous wave,
No Siren sprung from secret cave;
But in the form my fancy drew,
The Beatrice of old I knew.

Beatrice read these complimentary lines with deep attention; her first feeling being that they conveyed a very gratifying proof of admiration and attachment; but, unfortunately, on second thoughts, they seemed rather to proceed from a heart free enough to amuse itself by delicately flattering any person who happened to please for the moment,—and such flattery,—such lavish compliment, was not what she desired.

“No; I am disenchanted. I see plainly how it is now. Arthur never *loved* me, and it was only his capricious moods which I foolishly mistook for fits of jealousy. I must indeed beware of giving him my heart unsought,” she reflected, just as Mrs. Mordaunt and Reginald joined her; and she slipped the paper out of sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

False as hope!
To-morrow's heritage is cloud and storm.
PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

THE holiday was over, and its hopes vanished. Arthur was re-established in his painting-room; Beatrice back at Lynwood, wandering sadly amongst her neglected flower-beds, thinking of old times, and reflecting with the deepest pain that 'a dreary sea now flowed between' herself and one she used to see so constantly. She now seldom went to Stapleton; yet still the anticipation of Arthur's approaching departure distressed her,—for it would place him so far beyond her reach; and she guessed too

well how changed he would be upon his return. Reginald was also going away; for having obtained a commission, he was now about to join his regiment, and then, how desolate *her* life would be! At Lynwood, there was no change save the alterations of violent excitement, and dull stagnation; and when she looked forward it seemed as though the prospect was unendurable; a long, monotonous existence, without hope or aim. She was so young, so strong, and capable of *enjoying* life, that her destiny seemed doubly wretched; and she could have wished to exchange her vigorous constitution for Arthur's fragile one,—for then there would have been more chance of a release.

Meantime, at Stapleton, all was anxious preparation; and Mrs. Wilton's heart was also failing her at the thought of losing both the boys at once. To part with her own darling Reginald was the sorest of trials; but she grieved that Arthur would persist in taking so long and lonely a journey, for she felt that of

the two, he stood in reality in most need of her care; and had she not been convinced that he *had* good reasons for carrying out his resolution, and that if his health did not give way whilst he was absent, it might be beneficial to him to feel independent, and to be (as he had urged), thrown entirely on his own resources, she would have entreated him to stay at home. But as it was, she concealed her sorrow, and with apparent cheerfulness, got everything in readiness for their departure.

Reginald was going first, but his new duties would only take him to the south of England; and Beatrice thought that such a slight distance would not make much difference after all, for *he* could return home at almost any time. It was Arthur's long journey that caused her such unhappiness, and the impossibility of being near him upon any sudden emergency,—should such arise: and her fears whispered that it was but too probable. She went to Stapleton to bid adieu to Reginald;

and being in the garden with the two brothers, her full heart could not refrain from disburdening itself by the exclamation :

“ Oh, how much I shall miss you both ! How dreary it will be when you are gone ! ”

She looked almost reproachfully towards Arthur as she spoke, but he only bent his eyes upon the ground, and answered :

“ It is very good of you to say so ; though I cannot flatter myself that *anyone* will miss me. *Reginald* I know will be a loss.”

Beatrice gazed at him, with a passionate longing to say something more ;—something which would touch him, and dispel the coldness of his manner ; but the effort seemed useless, and she checked herself. Reginald, perceiving her embarrassment, endeavoured to laugh the matter off.

“ How modest ! ” he exclaimed. “ And how *very* complimentary to me ! But really, Arthur, I do not see why you should set so low a value on yourself.”

“ *Why ?* ” replied Arthur, still without look-

ing up. "It is because I happen to be more clear-sighted than you imagine. And now I must go in; the colours upon my picture are doubtless dry by this, and I must make the most of my remaining time. I will leave you to bid one another farewell, for you must have much to say; and Beatrice," (glancing towards her for a moment), "it is not yet time for *me* to say good bye."

Tears of grief and perplexity rushed to poor Beatrice's eyes, as she gazed after him, exclaiming:

"Reginald, tell me, what is the meaning of this strange conduct? Have I offended him? He makes me wretched!"

Reginald shook his head.

"Do not ask me, for *I* cannot understand him in the least. He has seemed unusually gay and well till lately; talking about his journey, and the places he should make a point of seeing. But, to-day—he has relapsed into his former gloomy state."

“I see it. It is always so when *I* come here. He dislikes me,—though *why*, I cannot imagine.”

“No, Beatrice, I feel sure that you are quite mistaken. I believe, on the contrary, he *loves* you.”

“No, no, Reginald! It is impossible! Do not delude me with false hopes. Yes, *hopes*; I dare acknowledge it to *you*—who know my secret. You never must betray me.”

Reginald, deeply touched, took her hand kindly, saying:

“Poor Beatrice! But I wish that you *would* let me tell. If I might speak to Arthur;—if I had *your* sanction—”

“Never!” she cried vehemently. “It is humiliation enough that *anyone* should know. Even *you* may despise me in your heart for yielding to feelings which the world derides. To love *unasked*, is, as we both know, considered a disgrace to womanhood;—and how dare I flatter myself that you are exempt from

sharing it? *You*,—a young man, who are free to *do* and *be* whatever you please,—and therefore a most improper confidant for *me*."

"Oh, Beatrice, you cannot doubt *me*? Sorrow should not render you unjust."

Her manner changed instantly.

"I feel that you are right. Forgive me, for—whatever I might say in my haste,—I never could mistrust you in my heart. Dear Reginald, how could I? *You*, who have been a very brother to me in my trouble! What would have become of me without your sympathy?"

"Then trust me farther. Let me use my own discretion in acting for you, as I would for a sister of my own."

"No, Reginald,—*that* must never be."

"Then, at least, let me tell my mother. She might speak."

"No, no!" repeated Beatrice, with decision. "Thank you a thousand times, for your kind intentions! but if you would please me, mention—this affair to *no-one*. If you do, it will

make my position more humiliating and less endurable than ever ; therefore promise," she continued, clasping his hand tightly in her excitement, "never to betray me. The only favour I ask is, that you will preserve my secret ;—and the better to ensure your silence, I will even put you on your honour.—Reginald !"

He answered first by a sorrowful, reluctant glance ; but perceiving that she was not to be moved by any persuasions, he added, with a sigh :

"Most unwillingly—I promise."

"Thank you ! Thank you ! *Now* I feel more satisfied, for I know that you will never break your word, even though (as I probably shall), I bid you keep my secret for life."

"You may depend upon me ; though I trust that you will some day give me absolution,—unless, indeed, circumstances should render it unnecessary.

"Say no more about it, for I cannot bear to talk it over. Let the subject sleep for ever !

I would rather speak about your own affairs ; and though I ought not to say so,—ought not to wish to keep you here in idleness, I *do* wish you were not going,—for I shall then be all alone !”

With these last words, the restraint she had hitherto imposed upon her feelings, utterly gave way, and bursting into tears, she covered her face with her handkerchief, and left him hastily : he, gazing sadly after her, uncertain whether it were better to follow, or to leave her to herself ; but after a moment’s hesitation, he decided on the latter course, and walked slowly and thoughtfully in an opposite direction.

Little did they guess that Arthur was even then watching them from the window of his own room ; or that misconstruing their actions, his heart was once more filled with jealousy and bitterness. The two that he looked down upon were undoubtedly lovers ; Reginald took Beatrice’s hand, and she clasped his, and gazed passionately into his face in return. They

were full of sorrow at their approaching separation, and comforting each other by the tenderest professions. Then that burst of uncontrollable grief,—that sudden flight ! And Reginald's more manly way of bearing *his* share of the oppressive burden ! But their grief would not endure for ever ; *they* would soon meet again ; and were happy in the consciousness that *their* attachment was requited ; whilst *he*, the miserable witness of their leave-taking, had no ray of light, no hope, no happiness in store ! To *him* all was dark—utterably dark and dreary as the grave towards which he floated down the black and sluggish stream of life !

“ It is well that I am going,—first to Italy, and then, I trust, to a still more distant region—whence there is no return. Who cares what becomes of *me* ? Reginald has Beatrice, his father, and his mother. *All* are full of grief that *he* must leave ; all busied in preparing for *his* journey,—whilst *I* am forgotten,—utterly forgotten ! ”

In the bitterness of his heart, Arthur turned towards the portrait of his own ill-fated mother, which he had long ago obtained permission to hang up opposite his bed, and flinging himself upon a sofa beneath it, gave way to the wildest anguish ; exclaiming :

“ Oh, mother ! mother ! Would that I were with you ! That I were at rest ! Oh, that the dead might speak, for then would I implore you to say something which might comfort this perplexed and breaking heart ! But it cannot be,—and I am all alone ! ”

Thus he raved ; yet feeling amidst his grief and passion, that he was unjust—ungrateful to her, who had for many years supplied his mother’s place ; but the dim conviction of his wickedness, instead of softening, only rendered him more hard and bitter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FURTHER ESTRANGEMENT.

“O life, as futile then as frail !
O for thy voice to soothe and bless !
What hope of answer or redress ?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.”

TENNYSON'S IN MEMORIAM.

AFTER Arthur had fairly started on his travels, and was able to reflect with less prejudice upon the past, he was glad that he had controlled his feelings sufficiently to bid Reginald a kind farewell, and to take a quiet, friendly leave of Beatrice. And still more did he rejoice that he had done so, when the Russian war commenced, and he received tidings that his brother's regiment had been ordered to the East. All his old affection for him (driven

from his heart for a brief space by jealousy), instantly revived; and had there been time, he would have hastened home again to see him ere he started on so dangerous an expedition. But there was not; and bitterly regretting any display of evil passions which had latterly destroyed the harmony of their intercourse, and grieving for the sorrow which he knew his mother (and fancied that Beatrice also) must be enduring, he yielded to the better impulse which prompted him to write feelingly upon the subject, both to Mrs. Wilton and to Reginald; but he scrupulously refrained from mentioning any member of the family at Lynwood. With Mrs. Wilton, he corresponded steadily: endeavouring to make his letters interesting by descriptions of scenes and objects, which let him *write* of them in any terms he pleased, could yet scarcely withdraw his thoughts from more engrossing matters;—old familiar haunts and faces, and the one strong passion which had changed the even current of his life. Everything he saw

and heard, instead of leading his mind away from Beatrice, seemed rather to carry it back again to her : each grand old picture or statue even—without bearing the slightest actual resemblance to *her*—appearing strangely to revive her image. Perhaps because it was so closely interwoven with ancient associations and trains of thought ; for all his dreams, his aspirations, and his studies, had once been shared with her, as with his brother ; perhaps because all that is beautiful in art or nature *must* recall the beloved one to a constant heart, and make it long once more to share with her (or him), its interests and pleasures,—if not its troubles.

Be that as it may, he often pined amidst the glorious beauty of Italy, for all vanished pleasures, instead of seizing upon those so lavishly displayed before him ; he was sick in mind and body, and had no companion ; therefore the glowing charms, the poetic associations of that classic land, were powerless to rouse him from his despondent state. Re-

clining amidst its whispering groves, he sighed for the society of the wood-nymph, (as Reginald had called her;) gliding along the silent canals of Venice, between long ghostly rows of mouldering palaces, he thought how they had read and dreamed together of such scenes; in Florentine galleries, amidst the lovely scenery of Torrento, the ruins of Rome, the desolation of Pompeii, or the life and gaiety of Naples, she was ever present, ever remembered with the keenest regret.

Of course, time must in some measure dull all mortal passions, as it casts a softening veil over all the past; just as it clothes the blackened, shattered tower with moss and ivy; so that Arthur's feelings could not be quite so poignant as when at Stapleton, and whilst this sorrow was still new; but still they were powerful enough to mingle with, and give their own dark tinge to all he saw. The radiant skies lost half their glory, by comparison with the colder ones which over-arched the spot where *she* resided; or the

scenery appeared *too* bright and dazzling to suit his gloomy state of mind ; and he longed for home, yet had not courage to return.

His sojourn in Italy was not, however, altogether wasted ; he studied diligently, and his pictures gained somewhat of the colouring—if not the spirit—of those great masterpieces which he took for models ; but his soul was not, as formerly, devoted to his art, and consequently, though his *copies* of other painters' works were good, the creations of his own brain were generally failures, for they lacked the life-like power, the ideal expression, which he had once stiven so ardently to attain. He preceived this with shame and anger, and leaving the study of the beautiful, turned his attention to the terrible ; succeeding better in such subjects as affect us through our strong passions, rather than through our more exalted feelings ; such as appeal to anger, fear, or wonder, in lieu of veneration, faith, and love. Yet spite of this perversion of taste, his sketches of Italian scenery were

full of sweetness and repose ; his landscapes, breathing warm air and sunshine, delicately finished ; his groups of peasantry, characterised by vivacity and vigour ; and his ruined temples, grand and solemn ; for when not pre-occupied, no one knew better how to seize the happy moment when a favourable light was over all. Nevertheless, whether successful or the reverse, all seemed but vanity and vexation, for the hopes and aims which made life sweet, were gone.

Whilst Reginald bravely endured the hardships amidst which he found himself ; making light of them, and winning approbation and good-will ; ever unselfish, ever firm in principle, and ever contented with the simple discharge of duty,—Arthur languished in a land of loveliness, sighing for that which seemed unattainable—wearying, disquieting himself in vain.

His step-mother finally recalled him, not only to England, but to the recollection that

something was due to others, and that he was acting selfishly in forgetting them whilst brooding over his own private troubles—for she found the old house at Stapleton so desolate, that when spring came she implored him to return.

“Come home, dear Arthur. I do so long to have at least *one* of you back again, and I think that it would really be a comfort to your father; so, (unless you particularly dislike the notion,) do let us see you soon.”

Thus Mrs. Wilton wrote, and from her heart; and Arthur felt that he ought to do what she desired. But what a strange fancy that *he* could be a comfort to his father! After a little reflection, he came, however, to the conclusion, that it *should* and *might* be so, if he himself were only what he ought to be. He pressed the letter to his lips.

“Dear mother, I will do your bidding. I will not return your kindness with ingratitude and selfishness,” he murmured. “Neither

you nor my father shall have reason to complain ; therefore, cost me what it may, I will return."

Beatrice heard with a strange mixture of exciting feelings, first, that he was expected shortly, next, that he was on his homeward way, and lastly, that he had actually arrived ; but though, during his long absence she had been constantly at Stapleton, anxiously watching for every new piece of information about Arthur, and sitting silently listening by the hour together to Mrs. Wilton and her mother's conversations about "the boys," now that he had returned she hung back shyly, waiting to accompany Mrs. Mordaunt when she went to visit him, instead of flying eagerly to welcome him back, as she would have done in former happy days.

Those happy times, with their pleasant absence of all ceremonious restraint, and their warm, truthful friendship, had passed by for ever, to be replaced by formality and cold reserve ; and Beatrice no longer dared to hope

that any fortunate circumstance would bring about an understanding between Arthur and herself. They could neither meet upon their ancient friendly footing—as old intimates and playmates,—nor yet,—as she *once* hoped they might have done,—but simply as indifferent acquaintance! This thought was very painful, for it extinguished the last glimmering spark of that fire which had given warmth and brightness to her otherwise dreary and monotonous life at Lynwood.

Very lingering and painful is the death of hope, and very cheerless the heart where it is buried; as might have been divined by anyone who had closely examined Beatrice's countenance,—once so animated, and lighted by such brilliant, earnest eyes, but now always so subdued and quiet. She had grown paler and thinner too, and seldom spoke unnecessarily, instead of letting her words flow forth gaily and without restraint; nor did she seem to take much interest in any of her old pursuits.

And now when her mother bade her prepare

to accompany her to Stapleton, she rose from her low seat by the window, where she was sitting reading, slowly, and with such apparent reluctance, that Mrs. Mordant said in some astonishment:

“Why, Beatrice, how very unaccountable you are! Once it was impossible to keep you from (as it seemed to *me*) almost too frequent visits to Stapleton; and now you appear as though you did not care to go at all. How is this? I thought you would be glad Arthur had returned.”

“And so I am,” exclaimed Beatrice, rising, and turning crimson. “I—was only finishing this chapter. I *am* pleased—that Arthur is so much improved in health; and of course I *shall* be very glad to see him again.”

“Hum! You do not *look* as if you would. But go and get ready, and don’t keep me waiting,” returned her mother, thinking that Beatrice’s seeming coolness proceeded from dejection at Reginald’s long absence, and uncertainty as to when he might return. This

idea exerted a softening influence over Mrs. Mordaunt, and prevented her saying more upon the subject,—much to her daughter's relief, she having expected to be questioned far more closely upon that point, which of all others, she felt most unwilling to discuss.

“I don't care how I look, or how I dress,” thought Beatrice, as she drearily put on her hat and cloak;—and yet, she *did* linger for a minute before the glass,—just long enough to see that her hair and clothes were neat and well arranged as usual, and that she herself looked tired and spiritless. “Yes; my good looks are gone. I look quite worn and faded. But what does it matter? They were lost upon *him*, so it will make no difference,” she added, suppressing a regretful sigh, and disposing her hair so as to conceal the thinness of her cheek, even whilst affecting to consider it of no importance.

They set out in silence; she just turning her head towards her flower-beds as she passed them, and sadly remembering how seldom in

old times she had gone to Stapleton, without carrying thither an offering of their fairest blossoms,—for Arthur, who would care so little for them *now*.

She and her mother spoke but little by the way, though the latter seemed kinder in her manner towards her, and the mile of intervening fields was soon passed over. Too quickly, for she was not yet prepared for the approaching meeting; and once within Mr. Wilton's grounds, her heart beat so violently that she could scarcely breathe, whilst she found herself continually casting hurried glances on every side, and starting nervously at the slightest sound. The few moments whilst they waited for an answer to the bell, appeared an age; though, once more, when the servant obeyed their summons, Beatrice felt a strange reluctance to enter the house which recalled so many old associations, both of pain and pleasure.

Mrs. Wilton and Arthur were together; the

former rising with a smile to welcome them ; the latter with an air of shyness and restraint.

“ You have lost no time in coming. This is very good of you,—and you will find him so much better,” exclaimed Mrs. Wilton, with an eagerness which proved her satisfaction.

“ Is it not so, Arthur ? ”

“ Yes,—I think it very kind. I am much better for the change,” he answered hurriedly, and as if he scarcely knew what he were saying.

Beatrice felt her face flush ; but she endeavoured to look composed whilst offering her hand ;—no easy matter, for the contact made her absolutely tremble. She said something cold and common-place, which Arthur answered in the same tone ; glancing slightly at her whilst he was speaking, and turning with a sense of relief to Mrs. Mordaunt, who, fortunately for her daughter, at first quite monopolised his attention. Beatrice sat silent whilst her mother questioned him about his travels ;

thinking that to *her* mind Arthur did *not* look much better, though perhaps this might merely arise from temporary weariness.

“So you really feel stronger?” enquired Mrs. Mordaunt.

“Oh! yes; or I could not have gone through so much. You can have no idea how much I have really seen and done.”

“You should, however, take care not to do *too* much. It is possible to wear one’s self out in the pursuit of health.”

“No fear of that—the air of foreign countries is so much lighter than our own.”

“I should have thought it would be more relaxing; though of course I cannot judge, as (strange to say,) I have never been abroad.”

“So I have heard you say before. But if possible, you should contrive it, for I think that every body ought to go. There is so much to interest,” answered Arthur, turning towards Beatrice whilst he was speaking, as if involuntarily, and from the mere force of ancient habit.

"Just what I think," she said briefly, and forcing herself to look at him, whilst she enquired: "Have you been painting much of late?"

"Ah! what about the painting? How does that progress?" echoed Mrs. Mordaunt, with an air of interest.

"Oh! famously!" cried Mrs. Wilton, answering for her son. "But I like his water-colour sketches best; though I suppose it is treason to say so. But I cannot help it, for I understand them better. You must see them; they are really beautiful, and make one quite long to visit Italy."

Arthur answered, turning towards his mother:—

"I am glad you think so; for my time has not been wasted, if they give you pleasure."

"They do indeed. They could not fail to do so—to give anybody pleasure—if it were only for their own intrinsic merits."

"*Only?*" said Arthur, smiling.

"*Only,*" repeated Mrs. Wilton; "though

I value them even more for *your* sake than their own. And still more," she continued, turning towards her visitors, "do I value the comfort of having him at home again."

"Ah! that I can easily believe," said Mrs. Mordaunt.

Mrs. Wilton's affectionate glance suddenly became sad and tearful, as she thought of her own Reginald, and added with a sigh:—

"If his brother were but here as well! Then indeed I should feel very happy."

Arthur sighed also, and nerving himself to speak upon so delicate a subject, said, addressing Beatrice:—

"It is at least a satisfaction that he has had an opportunity of distinguishing himself."

"Oh! undoubtedly!" was her answer, just as the door opened to admit Mr. Wilton.

"You were speaking of Reginald," he said, with a proud smile. "Yes, I trust, poor boy, that he is getting on in his profession. He has gained a step, you know?"

"Yes, so I heard. We must congratulate

you, I suppose," returned Beatrice ; whilst Arthur watched her, saying to himself:—

"Why does she disown all more immediate interest in his success? Surely there is no necessity for such concealment!"

"Oh! certainly," replied Mr. Wilton. "I believe that Arthur rather envies him. How do you think *him* looking?" he continued, laying his hand quite affectionately upon his son's shoulder. "All the better for having seen a little of the world?"

"Yes," answered Beatrice, unwilling to give a disappointing response, though, had she spoken as she felt she would decidedly have said, "no."

"Have you seen his sketches? They are capital, and do him the greatest credit."

"So I have heard. I have not seen them yet, although," (rather shyly,) "I should *like* to do."

"Yes, you must. Where are they, Arthur?"

"I will fetch them," answered the latter, rising, glad to leave the room, and—Beatrice.

He avoided her eye, and hastening to his studio, threw himself into the first chair, and covering his face, sighed deeply. "I have seen her! We have met again! Thank heaven, that the first agony is over! *Now* I feel that I am stronger—that I can be firm! How little she guesses what I suffer in her presence!"

For a few minutes he yielded to regretful feelings, but presently, recollecting himself, he took up his portfolio and returned. His father was impatiently awaiting him.

"Come, Arthur," he exclaimed, taking possession of his drawings, "we began to think that you were playing us false; but I am glad to see that you are not quite so ungallant."

Arthur did not venture to look at Beatrice, who sat with her eyes fixed upon a little carved box, brought by him from Switzerland, and which Mr. Wilton had just been exhibiting. He endeavoured to laugh; and making some confused answer, occupied himself with

untying the strings of his portfolio—his hand shaking with excitement all the time.

The whole party then rose and gathered round the drawings; Mr. Wilton devoting his principal attention to Beatrice, who appeared absorbed in listening to his comments: feeling happier in being thus screened from Arthur's observation. Arthur, equally anxious to avoid her notice, took much trouble to explain everything to Mrs. Mordaunt, though every now and then he had to answer some inquiry of his father's.

"Arthur, what did you tell me about your expedition to Pæstum? This is the Grotta Azurra, is it not? Ah, I remember all these places well! But tell Beatrice about the beautiful transparency of the water in that singular cave, for you describe things wonderfully well,—far better than I do. I suppose it is a gift."

"I—" began Arthur, hesitatingly, "am afraid of attempting, for it seems impossible to do them justice. But if—if—" (he could

scarcely bring himself to pronounce her name, nor yet to speak of her more formally as ‘Miss Mordaunt,’) “Beatrice has never read it, I should recommend the ‘Improvisatore,’ for there she will find some very good descriptions of Italian scenery and life.”

“Indeed! I will try to get it then,” she replied, without asking further questions about the book; and in her embarrassment scarcely knowing what its name was even.

“No, no, she wants to hear you tell her,—not to read about it,” said his father laughing; “so no false modesty. You know you have the power.”

Thus adjured, there seemed no help for it, so Arthur began a history of the celebrated Blue Cave,—of which Beatrice, however, scarcely heard a word; such a whirl of ideas were circling through her brain. Happily, Mrs. Mordaunt felt more interested and at ease, and once more managed to supply her daughter’s deficiencies. She looked at the drawings, almost without desiring to make

unfavourable criticisms, as though it were a solace to steep her mind, at least, in the glowing sunshine, which in real life she seemed so anxious to exclude. She feasted her eyes on rich, warm landscapes, saying with a sigh :

“Ah! would that I were there! How charming to rest beneath the shade of orange groves, looking down lazily upon the summer sea! Arthur, I envy you. You must have been so happy there.”

Beatrice eagerly awaited his answer, but it was slow in coming; and at length he only said :

“It was very beautiful; but then, it was not *home*!”

And in gratitude for these words, Mrs. Wilton pressed his hand. Conscious that she little understood their real significance, he coloured slightly, and turned to take from the table a sketch upon a scrap of tinted paper, asking : “What do you think of this effect?”

But even as he spoke, it slipped from his uncertain hold, and he bent down to re-

cover it, just as Beatrice made the same movement, and consequently, their hands met again. He rose hastily, leaving it in her possession; but she had felt how violently he started back from her, and mistaking his feelings, was (and not unreasonably), aggrieved.

“Has his dislike become so strong as that?” she thought, with indignation. “Be it so! I know how to keep my distance!”

And coldly restoring the little drawing, without word or glance, she moved away from him as far as possible, and even avoided offering her hand on leaving; a slight which he felt deeply; which he felt too was not altogether undeserved,—though, at the same time he knew there was no chance of explaining, or of deprecating her resentment.

CHAPTER XIX.

A REMEDY FOR DISAPPOINTED HOPES.

It is a dismal malady, and this,
Like all our thousand miseries beside,
Demands a remedy that kills or cures.

TAYLOR'S PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

THIS glimpse of the happy family party at Stapleton, made Beatrice feel still more dreary and despondent upon her return home; yet even whilst feeling offended with Arthur for his strange conduct towards herself, she had generosity enough to rejoice at the improvement of affairs between him and his father; and she did not wonder that the latter should now seem proud of his elder son.

But whilst brighter prospects were thus

opening for Arthur, how cheerless had her own become! She was miserable on account of the change; and at the same time so proud, that nothing could have induced her to seek an explanation.

“He once cared for me,—of that I feel convinced; but the fancy (as he doubtless considers it) is over now; and he shall see that I am not willing to be taken up, or cast aside, according to the caprice of the moment, and only too thankful for any slight return of favour,—but that I can be cold and indifferent as himself. My plan is fixed, and from henceforth we must meet but seldom, and as strangers.”

Such were Beatrice's reflections; and wounded pride gave her strength to adhere to a resolution which cost much secret torture. But to her, any sacrifice was better than the humiliating one of making the first advances towards reconciliation with a person who would probably value it so lightly. And thus

their mutual estrangement appeared too likely to endure for ever.

Arthur shut himself up again in his studio : working with more perseverance than success ; for, let him strain every nerve to attain that which seemed unattainable,—let him exert himself until his small amount of strength gave way—he was still far as ever from the mark at which he aimed, and consequently a miserable, disappointed man. Art could not solace him for the loss of that which he held even dearer, neither could his struggles with its difficulties teach him to forget ; but still he toiled on desperately, though he seemed, instead of gaining, daily to lose ground, and though every fresh failure or disparaging comment, exercised an almost maddening influence.

And in the meantime, Beatrice seemed, first to lose all interest in everything ; yielding to a sort of moral lassitude ; and then, a sudden re-action following, to be seized with a never-

ceasing restlessness, which caused her to rush into every occupation that offered itself, with an energy which both surprised and wearied others.

People said that Miss Mordaunt had taken a 'serious turn,' for she began to dress with studious plainness,—always choosing shades of grey and brown, instead of the more lively colours which she once preferred. She avoided works of fiction (in fact, no story could rivet her attention now); she began to take an active part in village matters, especially the schools; and presently, to take long walks,—three miles and back again,—to attend daily services in a neighbouring town. Her mother remonstrated; her father was even violent upon the subject; but her religious exercises, instead of softening, only rendered her more obstinate; and a little persecution actually gave more zest to these new occupations. When opposed, she began to regard herself as a martyr to the cause, and battle determinedly for liberty of conscience; i.e.: liberty of doing

as she pleased ; asking large indulgence for *her own* opinions, whilst with her narrowed views, she grew more and more inclined to be severe upon her neighbours.

Anyone who dared to think or act differently incurred her severest censure ; and woe to those who dared to dream of earthly happiness ;—of social pleasures ; or worse still, of marrying and giving in marriage ! Blind were they, and deluded ; for this life was (and *ought* to be), but a state of continual penance, such as she contrived to make it in her own case ! Now the house was scarcely dark and gloomy enough to suit her taste ; for if she loved light, that was only the more reason why she ought to sit in twilight shadow ; and if, when she sat drearily working at the altar-cloths, and other church embroidery which occupied all her leisure time, the darkness hurt her eyes,—why so much the better, for it was but another trial of her patience ! That patience which so often failed her when remonstrated with ; and which might have been shown to so much more ad-

vantage, in yielding up her will to that of her parents,—even though they might appear unreasonable.

Everyone regarded her with mingled fear and dislike. No one trusted, or gave her credit for kind feeling now. On every side she encountered cold, suspicious glances, and the very school children for whose welfare she exerted herself so energetically, proved ungrateful—because she looked forbidding and severe. In return, she despised them; persuading herself that there was so little congeniality between herself and them on account of her superiority of intellect; that they were incapable of understanding her (as indeed they *were*!) and that though she might, and *ought*, to labour incessantly for their benefit, it was utterly useless to hope for much improvement;—and as for attachment, on either side, *that* was utterly out of the question!

Thus she stood aloof from sympathy, and all gentle impulses; too proud to make the

first advances ; half disgusted ; yet triumphant that it was so,—for it was good for her to walk in thorny ways ! Still thorns are both painful and irritating to poor frail mortals, and her boasted patience was often sorely tried ; her health gave way from over-exertion of both mind and body ; and her prayers, exhortations, High-church ceremonies, and decorative works, were powerless to fill the void within her heart. She continued to feel dissatisfied ; and was even perplexed and disappointed *there*. And no wonder, for she was too intellectual to find much solace in mere outward forms.

Better,—far better, both for herself, and all who came in contact with her, would it have been if she had cast off all mistaken pride, and seeking an interview with Arthur, spoken with equal openness and delicacy ; for *then* there must have been an end to all misunderstandings ; or if she had scruples about taking such a course, to have at least confided her troubles to her mother, and suffered herself to be guided

by her advice. But that,—the simplest and most straight-forward course, she steadily refused.

Consequently, months passed on in this mistaken system of self-torment, and fruitless pageantry; vain mockeries of religion; the mere *name* without the real essence; dead works interwoven with actively bitter and uncharitable feelings; and during this period she scarcely ever went near Stapleton. She was too busy,—always too much occupied to stir from home,—except when *duty* called her thence;—the daily services; the incessant teaching in her school. But no one would miss her; she was but a dull companion, who knew not how to make herself amusing. Once, twice, three times, she saw Arthur for a few moments, but then not alone; and her manner was repellant to the last degree; so chilling, that he also began to feel afraid of her, and to wonder how Reginald would like the change.

All through the hot weather, she continued her exertions; sitting in close school-rooms,

and toiling wearily along the dusty roads,—regardless alike of her parents' displeasure, and the unceasing strain upon her physical and mental powers. And at length, as might have been anticipated, just when autumn arrived, and she was beginning to flatter herself that her labours would be somewhat lighter, her strength gave way, and brought her to a thorough stand-still.

Coming home one day after a hard afternoon's work in the school, she entered the drawing-room, and sank wearily into a chair; Mrs. Mordaunt, who was sitting there alone, following her with that cold, displeased look which Beatrice had now to encounter more frequently than ever.

"You seem tired," remarked the mother.

"Rather," was the brief reply.

"And no wonder! You know well that I object to your being out so much without me."

"But, the schools. I can assure you that I teach in them only from a sense of *duty*, not

for *pleasure*," returned Beatrice, with her grand martyr air.

"It appears, then, that our views of duty differ. But we will not discuss that point now. I should think that you had better go and lay aside your walking things before you rest."

"In a moment; after I have had time to take breath."

"Hum! As I expected! You would have found it best to follow my advice."

"Possibly," said Beatrice, rising. "But it is still wearier work to stay at home and do nothing all day long."

Mrs. Mordaunt looked still more coldly displeased by this reply.

"You might find plenty of occupation if you chose. For instance, your dress is torn until it looks quite disgraceful—"

"Is it?" was the indifferent answer.

"Yes, were you not aware of it?"

"I remember something about it now. It must be mended."

“ You appear to take it very coolly ; but, Beatrice, you should not be *above* such matters.”

“ It is of little consequence ! Who cares how *I* look ?” burst forth her daughter ; with all the vehemence of over-weariness. “ I have not had time to think about it.”

“ Just what I complain of ; but, indeed you are mistaken if you think such little things beneath your notice. No-one will think the better of you for this affected superiority ; and for my own part, I cannot understand this sudden change ; though, it appears to *me* that you are sadly altered for the worse of late.”

This last attack was too much for Beatrice ; reminding her as it did of the true cause of this sudden change ; and whilst endeavouring to laugh the matter off, she all at once became hysterical. Mrs. Mordaunt started up in consternation, brought wine, produced her smelling-salts, and then entreated her daughter to be calm, and tell her if she were unhappy,—if any painful matter weighed upon her mind.

“Poor Beatrice!—My dear child, do not give way thus!” she exclaimed, with a complete change of tone and matter. “Tell me what distresses you. I trust you have no concealments from your mother.”

“I am tired out,—I cannot help myself,—or I would not have been so foolish,” gasped Beatrice, trying in vain to check her convulsive sobs. “I am ashamed to be seen in this state. Let me be alone. Oh, all that I ask is to be *quite* alone!”

“You shall. Come to your own room, and I will leave you in peace,” said Mrs. Mordaunt, far more coldly. “I should be very sorry to annoy you; but I thought—”

“Oh, mother, do not vex me with misunderstandings, for I cannot bear it just now;—I cannot talk much till I feel a little better. I will go up-stairs, and keep *quite* quiet for a little.”

“Then you do not want *me*?”

And the offended mother turned from her ungrateful daughter with even a more frigid

air than usual; so little did she understand the intense sufferings of the latter, or the spirit of gentleness and forbearance which would best have met the requirements of the case. But thus it ever was; a word or look displeased her, and often without the offending party being able to discover the real cause of offence; for opportunities of explanation seldom were afforded; Mrs. Mordaunt's sullen reserve, checking all confidence, and rendering both herself and others miserable,—and often without reasonable occasion.

Beatrice went to her own room, and lay down; but it was long before she could regain composure; and when she at length appeared at dinner-time, her eyes were heavy, and her whole air betokened sickness of heart, and weariness of body. Her father was absent on one of his frequent expeditions up to Town, and she and her mother were left *tête-à-tête*; she being scarcely able either to touch anything, or speak without a fresh burst of tears, and the latter regarding her with the same chilling

and repellant manner. But finally, compassion gained the victory, and Mrs. Mordaunt looked and spoke more kindly; so much so that had Beatrice not been so utterly exhausted, she would have relieved her feelings by a full confession of the truth. Wearied, however, as she was, she could not then enter upon so exciting a subject; and therefore contented herself with regrets at having alarmed her mother, and assurances that she should be better in the morning, but would take more care of her health and strength in future, for that in truth, her exertions had been greater than they would permit. And then the two ladies embraced and parted for the night.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXPLANATION.

I will not shut me from my kind,
And, lest I stiffen into stone,
I will not eat my heart alone,
And feed with sighs a passing wind.

IN MEMORIAM.

MORNING found Beatrice so ill and languid that she was quite ready to accede to her mother's desire that she would stay at home and keep quiet, instead of combating the point with the obstinacy which she had lately shown. Mrs. Mordaunt's evident anxiety, touched her so much, that she said, of her own accord, and with unwonted gentleness:

“Yes, mamma, I will rest to-day, and then I daresay I shall feel much better. I am so

sorry to have caused you so much uneasiness and annoyance, and think *now* that it was very selfish of me; though *that* never occurred to me before. But I was so unhappy,—oh, so miserable! that I could not do without employment; and I trusted religion might have afforded me some comfort; yet—I know not how it happened,—I was quite sincere, but I must somehow have made a great mistake, for instead of softening, it seemed to harden, and make me more thoroughly wretched than before. It seems to me that I have gone to work in the wrong way; displeasing you and papa, and wearying myself in vain, and the only excuse that I can offer, is, that I was working in the dark; therefore it was no wonder that I became bewildered.”

Mrs. Mordaunt’s conscience reproached her as she heard these last words, ‘working in the dark,’ for surely, had she not repelled her daughter’s confidence, the latter would have come to her for solace and advice: but what

n example had *she* set her, always dreary, and too often unapproachable! It now occurred to her for the first time that the painful change in Beatrice's habits and manner, was not the result of mere caprice and idleness, but derived its origin from some far deeper source.

Beatrice had just confessed that she was utterly forlorn and miserable; and now her mother endeavoured to atone for past neglect by earnestly entreating her to disclose the cause.

"My own child, tell me what has happened to distress you. Are you grieving about Reginald Wilton?"

"*Reginald?* Oh, no! I miss him, certainly; but I am only too proud to think that he is getting on so well, and trust that he may come back safely before very long. His father and mother,—and his brother too, I hope,—will be so rejoiced to have him home again."

“His *brother*?” repeated Mrs. Mordaunt, enquiringly; and her daughter instantly changed colour, and looked down.

“Can it then be *Arthur*?”

“Oh, do not ask!” cried Beatrice, imploringly. “I do not feel equal to answer questions on that subject now.”

Mrs. Mordaunt seemed surprised; but for once would not let cold displeasure overpower her better feelings.

“Not ask! Oh, Beatrice, I must be satisfied upon this point, and it will surely be a relief to you to share your trouble with your mother. A few words will suffice, for I already guess that *Arthur* is the cause of your unhappiness.”

As she spoke, she passed her arm round her daughter, and drew her towards her. Beatrice laid her head upon her mother’s shoulder, and once more bursting into tears, said, sorrowfully :

“He is. But do not blame him, for *he* is

innocent. It was entirely my own fault that I deceived myself."

"How could that be? Something on his part must have first led you to imagine—" began Mrs. Mordaunt, but her daughter interrupted her.

"Listen to me before you condemn him. Yet—there is nothing to tell, except that I was labouring under a vain delusion—for how long, I scarcely know; though it must have been gaining strength for years; but at length—at length, the awakening—was painful; but, thank heaven, it is over now."

She paused and sank her head still lower, whilst Mrs. Mordaunt, with a puzzled and dissatisfied air, waited to hear more; and the ice being broken, Beatrice presently continued, feeling a little happier when she had made a full confession. Mrs. Mordaunt stroked her daughter's hair, and endeavoured to say something which might comfort her; though she was still puzzled as to how this coolness had occurred; finally saying:

“ Soften it as you will, I am convinced that Arthur *must* have acted unjustifiably, and I regret now that you were permitted to go so frequently to Stapleton. He must have led you to believe—”

“ Say not a word against *him* ! Arthur is the soul of honour,” interposed Beatrice, with sudden vehemence.

“ Then,” returned her mother with decision, “ he must be attached to you, and some misapprehension on one side or the other has caused this serious estrangement. Cannot you think of any occurrence which may have led to it ? Reflect before you answer.”

Beatrice obeyed, whilst Mrs. Mordaunt anxiously watched her ; but the meditations of the former only ended with a sigh and mournful shake of the head.

“ Mamma, I *have* thought and thought the matter over, till my brain was weary ; but I can only recollect a gradually increasing coolness on his part, and a fear of—I know not what,—on mine ; though we parted as *friends*

when he set out for Italy. But upon his return I observed a total change. He seemed to avoid speaking to me; even to feel uneasy when I was present; and to what could I ascribe it, save to—I had almost said, *dislike*! Once indeed, I did flatter myself that—that he had a kind of liking for me,—stronger than, or at least different to mere friendship; but he was very young then, and his weak health may have rendered him capricious, or his feelings may have undergone a change. He may have seen some one whilst he was away—”

Here her voice faltered, and she left the sentence uncompleted.

Mrs. Mordaunt ended it for her by saying :

“ Whom he preferred to Beatrice ! I cannot say that such is *not* the case, yet it seems to me most improbable ; and I should be glad to have this mystery cleared up, therefore I consider it my duty to speak openly at once, either to him or to his mother.”

Beatrice turned crimson.

“Oh, mamma,” she cried hastily, “do not think of such a plan! I should be covered with shame, and never dare to look him in the face again. It would appear so like *forcing* him to an explanation!”

“Well, he *ought* to give one. I will stand no trifling. Young men are apt to fancy that they may amuse themselves by paying such attentions as he *must* have paid you, out of very idleness; and then, when they think that they have carried them too far, they suddenly draw back, turn cold, and ignore the past, regardless of the feelings of the person they have trifled with. I have had some experience of life, and too frequently observed such to be the case; but never where anyone belonging to *me* is concerned, shall such a line of conduct be pursued with impunity. I always had a regard for Arthur (though I confess I liked his brother best), and imagined him incapable of—”

But Beatrice would not hear her out. The

severity of her mother's remarks roused her to defend Arthur ; and she exclaimed eagerly, and not without some slight touch of indignation : " Mamma ! mamma ! don't talk so, for I cannot bear it. He *is* incapable of anything dishonourable or under-hand ; and if he *had* cared for me, surely—"

" You said yourself that his feelings might have undergone a change ; and that point at least I have a right to ascertain."

" Not for the world ! Oh, not if you consult *my* feelings ; for I know beforehand in what manner he would answer. He would feel, both that you considered his past conduct blameable, and that something was *expected* of him now. And accordingly he would at once decide upon making the necessary sacrifice of inclination, and come honourably forward. But do you think I would permit—far less *accept*, so terrible a sacrifice ? His own mother's story might afford a warning *there* ! So I entreat

you not to say a word upon the subject, for I mentioned it to you in the strictest confidence."

"But, Beatrice—"

"Mamma, you would not see me humbled further? It was humiliating enough to confess this—even to *you*; but I did so to relieve your anxiety on my account, and my own mind, by sharing the secret which had so long weighed upon it, with my mother. And I did so with the less reluctance, that I felt I might trust to her preserving the most honourable silence. Do not let me find myself deceived."

As Beatrice spoke, she clasped her mother's hand, and looked at her with such sad, imploring eyes, that Mrs. Mordaunt was compelled to yield. Her child appeared so ill and agitated, that she feared the effect of further opposition; and accordingly answered, (though ill-satisfied that Beatrice would have it so):

"My love, keep quiet, and I will not speak

without your permission ; though, in that case I cannot see the end of this affair."

"It is ended already," whispered Beatrice. "Only think well of Arthur, or I shall regret that I have told you anything.—I ask no more."

Thus the conference concluded ; but Mrs. Mordaunt still remained firmly convinced that Arthur had in some way behaved very ill ; and regard for her daughter's feelings alone ensured her silence ;—regard for her poor, pale, weary Beatrice, who now lay with closed eyes upon a sofa, as though far too weak and listless for further exertion, either of mind or body.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAIR OPPORTUNITY MISSED.

“Alas! how love can trifle with itself!”

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

THE languor which had seized upon Beatrice, did not pass away again after a day or two of rest, and Mrs. Mordaunt soon began to feel very anxious about her daughter, and to think that the best remedy for her, would be a thorough change of scene. At Lynwood, where everything was so connected with the past, her health and spirits were not likely to improve, and Mrs. Wilton's frequent visits, and kind enquiries, only tended to make matters worse.

“Why, Beatrice you used to be so strong.

How have you managed this ?" she asked on one occasion.

Mrs. Mordaunt answered for her daughter.

"She has been over-exerting herself, and must now pay the penalty of imprudence. Her long walks, and labours in the school, have been too much for her."

"Ah, silly child!" said Mrs. Wilton, gently, "you are just like Arthur, who will work himself almost to death, when the fit seizes upon him, instead of attending to my remonstrances. You young people are all alike; all equally imprudent."

"And selfish, I suppose," added Beatrice, with a forced smile; "thinking only of ourselves, and what we like, instead of considering what trouble and anxiety we are causing others."

"No, not selfish; only inconsiderate."

"But that is bad enough, if it has the same effect."

"Well, dear Beatrice, we will not discuss that point now. Only let it be a warning for

the future. Why don't you come to Stapleton more frequently? I think—though there is nothing very entertaining going forward, that the little change would really do you good; for here you have been working, working; thinking, thinking; over-tiring yourself with one continued round of occupations, without ever giving yourself the slightest holiday; and so, no wonder that you are not well. You have become quite a stranger to us during the last few months, and Mr. Wilton is always enquiring about Beatrice, and what *I* have done to make her shun our house; but I can only answer that I, at least, am innocent."

Beatrice coloured, and answered hastily:

"Do not ask me *why*,—for I am really quite ashamed of my remissness."

"Then make amends for it now, love, by coming often, as you used to do."

"When we return home," said Mrs. Mor-daunt. "But I want to take her to the sea-

side, if I can only persuade her father that it is really necessary."

This mention of the sea-side gave the conversation a rather less painful turn; and Beatrice inwardly trusted that the plan might be found practicable, if only to free her from the well-meant importunities of her friends, which, in the weakened state of her nerves and health, were almost more than she could endure. But Mr. Mordaunt was not easily persuaded to view the subject in the same light; answering when first it was placed before him:

"Pshaw! There's nothing the matter with the girl, but idleness and want of exercise. She ought to walk more."

"Hum!" returned Mrs. Mordaunt, drily: "she has walked enough,—*I think, too much, of late.*"

"Then let her walk *less*. That is still more easily remedied. It is discontent that ails her. You both want an outing; that is all."

Mrs. Mordaunt resented this last observation ; and her husband, giving way as usual, to his tyrannical temper, swore he would not stand such nonsense, and that, whether they liked it or the contrary, he intended them to stay at home.

“ You may repent it some day,” exclaimed his wife.

“ Very well ; it’s my own affair : but go from Lynwood, you shall *not*, with my consent. The air of this place is healthy enough for anyone ; and, confound it ! I am not going to give in to any fanciful complaints.”

Mrs. Mordaunt was far too angry to answer ; but a dark, sullen cloud, like that which lowers before a thunder storm, settled on her brow as she turned away. Gloom and dissension took possession of the house ; and each time that the subject was renewed, the state of affairs became less satisfactory. Beatrice was almost worn out with these domestic quarrels, and her exertions to keep peace between her parents ; and at length she became so ill that

her mother was justified in sending for a doctor, who succeeded in frightening Mr. Mordaunt into a reluctant compliance with their wishes.

Beatrice was really very weak; and too much out of health to ride with him, or play and sing him to sleep when he joined them in the drawing-room after dinner; her step was languid, and the freshness of her looks and manner gone; insomuch that her father thought it would be quite a relief to be rid of her for a time, and accordingly permitted her and her mother to set out together for the same sea-side place where they had stayed the year before—with Arthur! for such was Beatrice's desire.

As is usual in such cases, this arrangement was made quite in a hurry at the last, and Mr. and Mrs. Wilton only heard of it in time to call and say good-bye.

“And no Arthur!” thought poor Beatrice, who had secretly hoped for some display of feeling on his part. “He has sent no message

even ! Can he really be so changed that he is quite indifferent ?”

But how was that question to be answered ? Mrs. Wilton spoke with satisfaction about his improved health, so that it was evident he *might* have come ; and his father, who was now on the best of terms with him, and from hearing his talents praised on every side, had actually grown quite proud of him, talked much about his paintings, and the progress he had made of late ; but no word, no hint, of anything beyond. She was thankful, when, with still more feeling, they began to converse about the absent Reginald, for to *his* praises she could listen without pain ; but her heart was very heavy afterwards, as she slowly concluded her preparations for departure. She was still up-stairs, endeavouring to rest a little, when, late in the afternoon, Arthur himself arrived, and was shown into the drawing-room to her mother. Mrs. Mordaunt received him very coldly, but he was far too much pre-occupied to take much notice of her

chilling manner,—which was by no means a novelty.

“I have just heard,” he exclaimed, with an agitation which he vainly endeavoured to conceal, “that you are going from home;—that Beatrice is ill.”

“We are. It is true,” was the not very encouraging reply.

“But is it serious? I had no idea of this before.”

“Oh, dear no! Make yourself easy. It is really very good of you to take so much interest in her, but she is only rather delicate. The summer was trying, and you know that she will be always up and doing. Beatrice never lets the grass grow beneath her feet.”

“True!” answered Arthur, slightly relieved; “but are you sure that that is all?”

Mrs. Mordaunt, who was already seriously displeased with him, now felt provoked that he should dare to question her so innocently, and with such an air of interest.

“His conscience ought to tell him what is

really wrong," she thought; "and perhaps that is the reason of this sudden visit;—or perchance he wishes for a fuller triumph; and *that*, if I can prevent it, he shall never have! Certainly!" she added aloud: "we think we both require a little change. All people consider it desirable in autumn. Have you any thoughts of leaving Stapleton before the winter?"

"No:—I think not. When the cold weather sets in, my father and mother have some thoughts of going to Torquay."

"Upon your account? It is a good plan, though you seem much better on the whole."

"Oh, very much," returned Arthur, absently, whilst his eyes kept wandering towards the door. "Is—is Beatrice in?" he asked at length.

"Yes, I believe so. But too tired with packing to come down. She particularly begged not to be disturbed for *anyone*," was the emphatic answer; "so perhaps you will excuse her. I have no doubt that she

delivered all kinds of proper messages to Mrs. Wilton. Did you see her after her return?"

"Only for a moment.—Then you start to-morrow?"

"Yes: we leave here at half-past eight, to give us time. I daresay Beatrice is lying down now, so I will not go up to her," said Mrs. Mordaunt, actuated by a two-fold motive; that of sparing Beatrice an agitating meeting which might make her worse, and the desire of mortifying Arthur, towards whom she now felt deep resentment.

This was such a plain hint, that he rose to go.

"Then I will not stay longer, for I daresay you are very busy."

"Oh,—not particularly. Pray don't hurry. I am glad to see you, for you seldom come here," answered Mrs. Mordaunt, pointedly, and divided between politeness and displeasure.

"No,"—was the hesitating reply; and Arthur still lingered, as though wishing to say something more.

But ere he had summoned courage, the door opened, to admit, not Beatrice, but her father; who entered abruptly, saying:

“Come! it is dinner-time, and if you are not ready, you had better go and dress, for I can tell you that I do not mean to wait. How are you?” he added, much in the same tone, as he honoured Arthur with an ungracious nod.

The latter made some slight answer, and was thankful to escape: feeling that it was evident he was not wanted there; and he returned home grieved and disappointed, though still uncertain of his own intentions. What would he have gained by seeing Beatrice? Nothing! he replied with bitterness; and the illness which had so excited him was of no importance after all; so perhaps it was better that they should not meet. Beatrice did not seem to wish it, and he had no desire to thrust himself upon her notice.

She was left in ignorance of this visit, and set out on her journey with a heavy heart;

nor did the sight of old familiar haunts; the sands where they had wandered, the rocks which he had sketched, and the warm, sheltered nooks where they had sat together, tend to raise her spirits. All was dreariness and gloom ! Instead of improving in health, she seemed to grow worse, and her return home was in consequence delayed so long, that she thus missed seeing Arthur, who, with Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, was already settled for the winter at Torquay ;—a relief, and yet at the same time, a most grievous disappointment ; and heavily, wearily, dragged on her own long dull days and evenings at Lynwood.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NEW SOURCE OF INTEREST.

For my heart was hot and restless,
And my life was full of care,
And the burden laid upon me
Seemed greater than I could bear.

But now it has fallen from me,
It is buried in the sea ;
And only the sorrow of others
Throws its shadow over me.

LONGFELLOW.

LETTERS from Mrs. Wilton brought no comfort, for they reported Arthur worse, and Reginald exposed to all the miseries of that terrible Crimean winter ; tidings which made Beatrice feel as though it were useless to struggle longer against the depression which had seized upon her mind. She ceased to in-

terest herself about the school and village, and quite neglected the daily services;—so little had they ever really influenced her heart,—now pining vainly for some ray of light.

“I am ill and wretched,” she reflected, “and I see no hope, no comfort, anywhere. Who cares for me? Who would share my sufferings? And above all, who would pray for me? I do not speak of my mother; for she of course grieves for me,—though she cannot altogether understand my feelings. She too, is far from happy, and I must exert myself to cheer *her*, rather than look for aid on her part; for how can she, miserable as she is, help me to overcome this gnawing sorrow? I must endure it alone; conceal,—make light of it: for the world is heartless, and I need not hope for sympathy. How is it, that with so much respectability; so great a clamour about religion; so strict an observance of its outward forms, there should yet be such a dearth of its true spirit,—of the humility which teaches us to esteem others higher than

ourselves; of the charity which thinketh no evil; and of the Christian love which should make us ever ready, and even eager, to ‘bear each other’s burdens?’ Where indeed? My eyes are opened, and I know (save dear Mrs. Wilton and Reginald, from whose sympathy cruel circumstances separate me,) not one person whom I can respect and trust. Clergyman and layman, all appear alike;—self-seeking, opinionated, vain; full of worldly projects, and indifferent to the sufferings of others. But have they no consciences; or how can they reconcile such conduct to them? *I* could not, were I in their place; and it seems such a pleasure to do good, that I wonder people so seldom allow themselves so cheap a luxury.”

In this changed mood, she once more went amongst the school-children and villagers; not so energetically as before, but in such a manner as to do them far more good; for she now endeavoured to enter into their feelings, to bear with their short-comings, and to set

them an example of gentleness and patience. Nor did these new efforts miss their due reward, for she gained more love and confidence than had ever fallen to her lot in former days.

“ Ah, this is more satisfactory than a multitude of mere barren observances. The dust may have settled on those numerous devotional books, once so often, now so seldom opened; but I can pray more fervently without them, for my heart knows its own requirements best; and whilst speaking words of hope and peace to others, I feel a peace and satisfaction,—not of this world, or its ordinances,—sinking down upon my soul. If God is my friend, it matters little that I have no earthly ones. If He is on my side, I need not fear, though all the human race were set against me. I will deny myself, and strive to do His pleasure, remembering that our true rest is above. Therefore, farewell all vain, vain dreams of earthly happiness !”

Thus passed the cold, dark days of winter, and when spring came, Beatrice was both

stronger and happier; thanks to the gradual change which had been wrought in her mind, and the new habits of *true* self-denial which she had acquired,—better than fast and abstinence, or endless meditations on her own private feelings and requirements. She was thus prepared also for a new event, which might otherwise have caused her some annoyance.

Mr. Mordaunt had an only sister,—left a widow about three years previously;—and now came the news that she was dead, entailing the necessity of bringing her two children home to Lynwood, where they were from thenceforth to reside. Their uncle and guardian did not seem to relish the prospect of this addition to his family, though he was as much distressed as his disposition would permit, at the death of Mrs. Leslie, whom he had not seen for some years, and the tidings of whose illness he had treated lightly,—till it was too late to pay her a last visit.

He felt this, more than even Beatrice (who knew him best), expected, though he was so

silent and reserved upon the subject, that she dared not touch upon it in his presence ; but it seemed to harden, instead of soften his heart, as might be gathered from some stray expressions of impatience.

“ Everything is against *me* ! There is no end of trouble of one kind or other. I think I am one of the most unfortunate wretches in existence ! ”

It was vain to speak of trials sent for our good, or of looking forward to a surer resting-place than this changing world can offer, for he would not listen ; shutting himself up alone to brood over his misfortunes whilst he smoked and drank ;—a pitiable example of what men may sink into, when they yield to their passions, and at the same time set aside all serious thoughts. People will not *think*, because they are determined not to amend ; and such was the case with Mr. Mordaunt ; who now seemed harsher, more tyrannical, and unapproachable, than he had ever been before.

He went to attend the funeral, arrange af-

fairs, and bring back his sister's children from their old home in one of the south-western counties; and Mrs. Mordaunt and Beatrice anxiously awaited his return, feeling that with the arrival of Harry and Cecil Leslie, a new life must begin; such an addition to their numbers disarranging former quiet and unsociable habits. Yet both felt too strongly for the two young mourners to give way to selfish regrets; especially Mrs. Mordaunt, who began to think that the companionship of her cousins might prove beneficial to Beatrice, who had been left too much to that of her own thoughts.

"Perhaps," said Beatrice. "Or rather, I may be able to help and comfort Cecil. It is long since I have seen her, and she was a shy, silent child then; some months younger than myself."

"And Harry, a wild handsome boy, about a year older than you," returned her mother. "We have heard so little about them, owing to that coldness between your father and theirs, (how commenced, I never rightly under-

stood, and dared not ask), that I have no notion what they are like now. But your poor Aunt Leslie was a most attractive woman ; clever, warm-hearted, and impulsive."

" Ah, so I remember ! And I used to wish that we lived nearer, that we might have seen her oftener. My uncle was cold and proud in manner."

" Yes, and thought so much about his family. But we must not speak evil of the dead ; their faults and failings ought to sleep with them. I wonder which of their parents these poor children resemble."

" So do I. Their mother, I should hope. Be that as it may, however, we must do our best to cheer them when they arrive."

" Good child !" said Mrs. Mordaunt, with more warmth than usual ; and softly smoothing her daughter's glossy hair. " I can trust my Beatrice where kindness is required, and I am glad to see that she herself seems happier."

Beatrice made no answer ; and even this

slight touch caused pain. Her lip trembled, and she looked away ; though only for a moment. In the next, she raised her head, saying with apparent animation :

“ Well, I am wasting time. I had better go and see that all is prepared for their reception. I always think the room which will be Cecil’s is the prettiest in the house,—though there is certainly more breathing space in mine.”

With these words she left the sitting-room, glad of the excuse of any active occupation ; and rather looking forward to the arrival of her cousins, who in due time appeared upon the scene.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. MORDAUNT'S WARDS.

Your hand is cold, like a deceiver's hand!
There is no blessing in its charity!

LONGFELLOW'S SPANISH STUDENT.

MR. MORDAUNT'S dog-cart was, by his orders, sent to meet him at the station, and Beatrice awaited with impatience the well-known sound of wheels upon the gravel; hastening to the door upon its return to welcome Cecil Leslie and her brother. The former—wrapped in a large grey cloak, and with her crape veil down,—was seated in front beside her uncle, and remained silent and motionless as a statue until some one should assist her to alight. A dismal little figure she appeared, for her atti-

tude was expressive of the deepest, though most patient dejection; but her brother—a slight, handsome young man, with light hair, and quick blue eyes,—seemed far less dejected, and sprang down from his seat behind, to help his sister to descend from her exalted position.

“Take care, Cecil; let me place your foot upon the step. Now hold my hand, and spring,” were his directions. Mr. Mordaunt (who looked more gloomy and morose than ever), meanwhile calling to the servant, “To look sharp, and go to the horses’ heads,” it being his custom to drive a pair of fiery thorough-breds, which were now chafing, and refusing to stand quiet.

“There’s no danger. Don’t be such a coward,” he said, turning to his niece, who drew back rather timidly as the carriage moved a few paces onwards, just as she was in the act of alighting. “Get out quickly, and you are safe enough. Here, Beatrice, just catch this wrapper,—and these shawls,” he continued

flinging them carelessly down to his daughter, who, accustomed to such greetings, took them from him as a matter of course.

Placing them in the hands of a servant, she at once advanced to welcome her cousin ; who she perceived was almost overcome with nervous apprehension, and seemed incapable of either moving or speaking without invitation ; but she wished that it had been possible to see her face, as she embraced her through the thick folds of crape, exclaiming :

“ I am very glad to see you. Come into the house.”

“ Thank you,” returned a low, and rather tremulous voice, as the invisible Cecil suffered herself to be led in, after Beatrice had just spoken a few words to Harry ; the latter colouring deeply, and relieving his embarrassment by appearing to turn his whole attention to the horses.

“ They go well,” he observed, addressing Mr. Mordaunt.

“ Ay,” was the complacent answer, “ I

should hope so. I think I know a little about such matters."

Leaving the uncle and nephew outside, the two young ladies entered the drawing-room, just as Mrs. Mordaunt was on the point of emerging from it to welcome the new arrivals. Cecil put back her veil, and passively received the kiss impressed upon her forehead; thereby disclosing such a sad, pale face, and eyes which seemed so hot and heavy, and unable to endure the light, that both her aunt and cousin viewed her with compassion.

"Are you tired, my love?" enquired the former, with that rare touch of gentleness which on special occasions characterised and changed her whole demeanour. "Come up stairs and rest a little before dinner."

"Thank you," was again the low, soft answer. "I should like it, for I am a little tired."

"You shall have some tea or something to revive you. I suppose your brother is here too?"

“ Yes.”

“ Beatrice will look after him, whilst we slip quietly away together,” continued Mrs. Mordaunt, passing her arm around her niece, and leading her from the room.

Beatrice looked after them, feeling both disappointed and a little jealous. Jealous of the kindness shown to Cecil, and jealous also of her mother for monopolising the attention of the latter. But she soon shook off these evil feelings, and kind thoughts were once more predominant in her mind when her father entered, followed by his nephew.

“ Hum ! Alone ?” exclaimed the former.
“ Where are the others ?”

“ Gone up-stairs,” she answered.

“ What, already ? Your mother is always in a hurry to get everybody to herself, particularly if they are as fond as she is of drinking sloppy tea all day. Your sister is not addicted to much tea, I hope ?” (This last remark being addressed to Harry Leslie).

“ No ; I don’t think she is—in comparison

with other womankind," returned the latter; whilst Beatrice drew herself up haughtily, and regarded him with rather a doubtful air, though she presently recovered enough to ask:

"Will you have anything after your cold journey?"

"Why, it must be dinner-time," said Mr. Mordaunt, ere his nephew could reply; "and there is no use offering people things to spoil their appetite. But, will you have anything?" (turning to Harry). "If you will, you had better say so."

Harry seemed uncertain, for his uncle's invitation was not very cordially bestowed; so that his private wishes and his dread of Mr. Mordaunt were at variance.

"It is nearly an hour to dinner-time," observed Beatrice, looking at her watch.

"What! by that useless thing in your hand? I daresay; for it is always wrong—behind hand—like the whole of my establishment."

"Strange! I imagined that (if anything,) it gained a little," was the quiet answer:

though Beatrice coloured slightly at this unjust attack upon herself and her watch. "But—can I get anything for any one?"

"There are bells—and servants; those who like can ring," growled Mr. Mordaunt. "You had better go and dress for dinner. Yet, stay," he added, as his daughter was proudly leaving the room, "you may bring me just a glass of sherry."

Harry Leslie turned to the window and looked out, not venturing to say that he should like one too; but Beatrice was considerate enough to think of him, and after an absence of a few minutes, during which her father walked about, examining every book and other stray matter strewn about the tables, she returned and ministered to their requirements, Harry accepting her attentions rather shyly.

This done, she went upstairs, and entering Cecil's room, found Mrs. Mordaunt still there, talking quietly and kindly to her niece, who was sitting in dejected silence with her back

to the light, thereby preventing Beatrice from obtaining a better view of her than before. Mrs. Mordaunt ceased speaking as the door opened, and inquired, after a short pause:

“Well, Beatrice, what is it?”

“They do not want me,” she thought; then aloud, “I only came to see—if I could be of use.”

“No, thank you,” answered Cecil’s gentle voice; “I have everything that I require, and shall be ready directly, for my aunt tells me that I need not dress for dinner.” Beatrice softened immediately.

“Oh, very well, then I will go and prepare, though there is no occasion to hurry, for it is quite early yet.”

“You are right,” said Mrs. Mordaunt, and her daughter left the room; the low murmured sounds continuing after her departure, and once more awakening vague feelings of annoyance; though she endeavoured to persuade herself that it was only natural her mother should pay particular attention to a

visitor thus circumstanced, and introduced into the family.

When they re-assembled in the drawing-room, the sight of all their mourning dresses impressed her painfully; it being almost the first time that she had been called upon to assume so dismal a garb: and a feeling of dejection stole over her, whilst her thoughts she knew not how, flew off to Arthur Wilton, and her own dreary, hopeless future, insomuch that she scarcely heard her father's rude remarks about "tea six times a day, &c.," such being the tenor of the greeting bestowed upon her mother. But at length she was aroused by hearing her own name repeated angrily, and then for the first time she became aware that he was addressing her. She shook off her absent mood, replying:

"Did you ask if I had been out to day? Yes—all the morning: though it was not very pleasant."

And as she spoke she perceived that Harry Leslie was employed in studying her atten-

tively, though he withdrew his eyes the moment that she raised her own. So quiet had the whole party been, that she, absorbed as she was in her own reflections, had almost forgotten the new arrivals ; but now that her attention was recalled to them, she seized the opportunity of studying each in turn, beginning with Harry, who sat exactly opposite.

He was handsome, and had a naturally intelligent and good expression ; but still there was something unsatisfactory in his countenance, which seemed to want strength, and to be in some measure clouded by dissipated, self-indulgent habits ; and young and inexperienced in such matters as she was, the contemplation of it was productive of unpleasant feelings. There seemed cause for apprehension,—of what kind, she as yet could scarcely tell, but certain it was that over his white forehead and clearly cut features, there appeared to hang ‘a shadow of a fear.’

She turned to Cecil, and the shadow vanished

at the first glimpse of her pale, patient face, for there was something pure and steadfast in the light of her large dark grey eyes, which could not fail to manifest itself upon the instant. She seemed one of those who are silent—not from want of thought,—but rather from an inability or unwillingness to speak of what they feel so deeply; and now it was evident, that whilst her brother had already shaken off the first passionate sense of bereavement, she was quietly, but incessantly, thinking of her mother.

Beatrice felt her own heart swell with love and pity, and inwardly resolved to resist all evil feelings where her cousin was concerned; striving indeed to prove herself a real friend. With the hope of diverting Cecil's thoughts, she drew nearer to her, entering into a quiet conversation (chiefly sustained upon *her* part, however), which lasted until dinner was announced; Mr. Mordaunt, meanwhile, appearing to read (whilst he secretly watched and

listened to them), and Mrs. Mordaunt devoting herself to Harry, who seemed embarrassed by his uncle's presence.

So was Cecil; especially when she discovered from time to time that he was looking fixedly at her, though it might have been a relief to know that he admired her small white hands, her delicately formed figure,—slighter and less than that of Beatrice,—and the soft sweep of her dusky hair. She was certainly very gentle and attractive in appearance; and even if her silence and dejection gave offence, the quiet grace of her manners, and the delicacy of her features and complexion, half atoned in Mr. Mordaunt's eyes for these defects. He glanced from her to Beatrice, as though comparing them; and the latter at least felt that his look and tone were softer when he spoke to Cecil, than when he addressed herself. But why should she resent this? She well knew his habits; and the influence of novelty upon his mind. Cecil was pretty,—Cecil was a new plaything,—and

consequently, Cecil was treated with more gentleness,—at present.

His scrutiny of Harry seemed less satisfactory, and he scarcely troubled himself all dinner-time to speak to him; in fact, he said but little to anyone, and the whole party sat in gloomy silence round the table, constrained,—and as though to get through the meal were a duty equally painful and important.

“Thank goodness!” was Beatrice’s involuntary exclamation, when Harry at length held the door open for the ladies to pass out, and she relieved herself by drawing a long breath in the hall. “I am always so glad when dinner is over. Are not you?”

“Yes, very,” answered Cecil, to whom this question was addressed. “I think one is generally thankful to escape.”

“Thankful, indeed,” said Mrs. Mordaunt, half aside. “But rest yourself, love; I am sure you must be very tired.”

Cecil acknowledged that she was, and permitting them to establish her upon a sofa,

spoke but little throughout that first long evening; though she seemed grateful for every slight mark of kindness, and gave promise of being a more agreeable companion at some future period,—when her grief should have subsided, and she herself become more settled, and accustomed to the ways of Lynwood.

Harry presently joined them, with the air of one who has escaped for a short time, and began to talk to his aunt about her little dog; from which point he was easily led on to tell her anecdotes about some dogs of his own; and had grown really animated on the subject, when, his uncle entering, his communicative mood received a sudden check.

Cecil sprang from her sofa; Beatrice offered him her chair, into which he sank, as if mechanically; asking:

“Have you had your tea?”

“Not yet!”

“Then you had better get it over,” as he pulled the bell; regardless of a murmured re-

monstrance on his wife's part, that it was not time.

"Do *you* drink as much tea?" he abruptly enquired of Cecil, as Beatrice handed her a cup, and poured out some coffee for himself.

"No," was the short and rather puzzled answer.

"I am glad to hear it; and mind they do not teach you their bad habits," (indicating by a motion of his hand his wife and daughter), "for *they* go on with it all day long."

"*That* charge is certainly untrue," said Beatrice, coolly; "for,—answering for myself,—*I* drink but very little."

"Then some one does,—or it is made for the mere purpose of being wasted. But I mean to put a stop to *that*."

Mrs. Mordaunt, who had hitherto been silent, could now refrain no longer, but observed, with a dry cough of displeasure:

"A pleasant beginning this, for Cecil."

To which he only answered "Pshaw!"

and stirred his coffee; which he then drank and held the cup for Harry to replace upon the table.

"Beatrice, play something," he commanded, as soon as the tea-tray disappeared again.

"Do you mind my doing so?" she whispered to her cousin; and Cecil hastily answered:

"Oh, no! I should prefer it."

A sentiment which Beatrice could easily believe to be genuine; for anything to break that evil spell which created such a dreary silence, must prove a relief. She therefore played; and Harry seemed to like it, though he listened with rather a sleepy air.

"And now," said Mr. Mordaunt, when she ceased, "*you* play too? Do you not?"

"Yes," was the nervous answer; and Cecil would never have dared to own how disinclined she felt for such an exertion, had not Harry roused himself on her behalf.

"She's too tired to play this evening," he observed. "Are you not, Cis?" he added,

drawing nearer to her. And Cecil, thus supported, owned that she was; whilst Beatrice thought more favourably of Harry—even on the strength of this very slight attention to his sister.

“Tired, are you?” echoed Mr. Mordaunt. “Then I should think you had better go to bed in good time.”

“Would you like to come now, dear?” asked Mrs. Mordaunt, in a kinder tone; and Cecil acknowledged that she would.

The aunt and niece rose and left the room together, and then Mr. Mordaunt addressed himself to Harry.

“Well, I do not see much good in staying here. Suppose we go and smoke.”

“I am ready,” was the willing answer. “Only let me go and change my coat first.”

And Harry also quitted the room, leaving Mr. Mordaunt and his daughter *tête-à-tête*; the former of the two sat silent for a minute; then he also rose and said:

“I must put on my dressing gown and

slippers.” A pause. And then he suddenly added: “What do you think of that young gentleman?”

“Think of him?” repeated Beatrice. “He seems quiet, but I can scarcely tell at present.”

“I can tell *you*, though, that he is a pretty good hand where there is anything to drink. I believe he got out at every station where we stopped;” (Mr. Mordaunt did not think it necessary to state that he himself had generally led the way on those occasions;) “But I shan’t stand such work! Confound me, if I stand it *here*!”

“I hope you are mistaken,” answered his daughter, feeling her vague apprehensions at once taking form, and thinking: “Heaven help poor Harry Leslie, if it be the case, for this is no good school for a young man of such propensities! How can they learn such habits! Oh, how unlike poor Arthur and his brother!”

“Mistaken! Pshaw! I tell you that it *is*

so. He has learned these nasty tricks at College,—at the *University*,” was added with a sneer. “And that is all that he has learned there, except—”

But here the unconscious Harry entered, and his uncle paused.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE 'SHADOW OF A FEAR.'

"Ay, sicker," quoth the knight, "all flesh is frail,
To pleasant sin and joyous dalliance bent;
But let not brutish vice of this avail,
And think to scape deserved punishment."

THOMPSON'S CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

HER father's portentous hints occupied Beatrice for some time after she went up stairs; compassion—anxiety, about her cousins, and especially where Cecil was concerned, chasing all more selfish troubles.

"How strange and mysterious it is!" she thought, "that there seems ever some misfortune in store, even for the most innocent. I fear—I know not what, on her account—but certain it seems that she, too has a dread

of something hanging over her; and should these accusations prove correct, God only knows what may be impending over her and Harry. May He watch over them, and avert this threatened evil—this dark shadow of disgrace—so terrible even to imagine!” Down on her knees, with her head bowed low upon her hands, she offered up supplications for them both; and thus calmed, she slept; but it was only to become the victim of wild, troubled dreams, in which Harry Leslie and Arthur Wilton were strangely confounded together; and Cecil, with her sad, wistful eyes, followed them through many horrible adventures and transformations, even as Beatrice, when waking, had seen her follow all her brother’s movements.

She rose with heavy heart, and meeting Cecil emerging from her room,—still and patient in appearance, as before, as the latter moved noiselessly along in her sombre dress, Beatrice impulsively clasped her arms around her, as if to shelter her from impending mis-

fortune, and kissing her pale, thin cheek, enquired with earnestness whether she felt rested. Cecil raised her eyes affectionately to her cousin's face, replying gently :

“ Yes, thank you. And I think mine such a pretty room.”

It was evident to Beatrice that she made this observation merely for the sake of saying something cheerful, for her eyes were still hot and dim, and her whole air betokened an inability to take much interest in anything.

“ Let us go down,” she said, slipping her arm, woman-like, round Cecil's waist; and leading her down into the breakfast-room. “ We are rather late people here. Do you mind waiting? Or suppose we breakfast *tête-à-tête* ?

“ Oh, please do not make any alteration in your plans, on my account,” was the alarmed answer. “ I am accustomed to—” She paused a moment. “ To do anything that others wish.”

“So I suspect,” thought Beatrice, as they gained their destination. “One might guess that from your patient, watchful manner. But, dear Cecil,” she added, aloud, “I think it would be best this morning, for papa is often very late indeed. Mamma generally breakfasts in her own room; so we had better get it over, and then there will be no occasion for *you* to wait here for anyone. It will be much pleasanter for you to go and rest.”

“You know best, of course; so let it be as you please.”

Beatrice rang to order breakfast.

“Yes, trust yourself to me, and I will initiate you into the customs of the house; not the most entertaining one in the world.”

“You seem quiet enough, however, and I don’t mind anything, if one can but have perfect quiet.”

“You will not find quiet of the most perfect kind; but still, enough of it, perhaps, to

satisfy your moderate requirements; and out of doors you will find a pleasant country, and a variety of pretty walks."

"Ah! so it appeared to me in driving from the station; though," (with a slight smile), "you are more backward here than in the south. I noticed the change as we were journeying northwards."

"You found the country looking far less fresh and green than that you were leaving behind?"

"I did," said Cecil.

"I am not acquainted with the warm southwestern counties, (though I have always longed to visit them, particularly, beautiful Devonshire and Cornwall), but I have heard that there *is* a great difference; and, as a proof of it, the nightingales seldom or never come to enliven us. I don't know that I ever heard one in my life."

"Oh! have you not? Theirs is such a sweet, clear note; and besides, one thinks

more of it, I suppose, from their singing in the night."

"I suppose so. I should like to hear them. Are you a good walker?"

"Pretty well ;—and I am very fond of being out of doors."

"That's right. Only tell papa so, and it will go far towards winning his heart, for I believe he thinks one ought to live out in the open air."

"That would be rather too much of a good thing," said Cecil, with the first faint approach to merriment that Beatrice had as yet seen her venture upon. "And besides, unless one had some object in so doing, I think it would be waste of time."

Beatrice laughed.

"And so think I. But what are your favourite occupations; gardening; reading; singing; drawing?"

"I like all in turn; but I have paid most attention to music, because Harry likes to hear

me play and sing. You know that he has been made the most of, and considered first at home?"

"Ah, I think that such is generally the case. We women are always too ready to wait upon, spoil, and study our brothers, husbands, or sons,—as the case may be."

"I hope," said Cecil, earnestly, "you will not think my brother has been spoiled. He is very generous and kindhearted; though perhaps——" she stopped short, from unwillingness to say anything to Harry's disadvantage.

"I understand. He has hitherto been much indulged, and had his own way in everything. It is rather a pity, but—don't let yourself feel anxious, Cecil,—he is young enough to grow into a strong, brave character. With such warm feelings, and intelligence as he has, one may always hope the best."

Cecil looked very grateful, as she answered:

"Yes, I *hope*—I *think* so. But it is bad for boys to be left entirely to a woman's care,

for such control is scarce sufficient;—they are apt to be over-indulgent, and to let their sons obtain the mastery. Don't think, however, that I would dare for a moment to throw blame upon my mother's judgment. Poor mamma! She was so very, *very* fond of Harry;—and no wonder, for he was so attentive to her, and her only son."

At this mention of her mother, Cecil's voice faltered, and she paused,—her lip trembling, and her eyes cast down. The two cousins were standing near a window, waiting, and Beatrice now took Cecil's hand, and pressed it kindly.

"Ah, no wonder! And no wonder either that *you* think so much about him. I can understand your feelings, though *I* never had a brother. How often have I wished I *had!*"

"And *I* that I had had a sister; for I think we always wish for what we have not," answered Cecil, rallying. "Not that I would have given up my brother."

“No; *that* I can easily imagine. Is he intended for any profession?”

A troubled look came over Cecil's face.

“I wish he would think about it. He has very good abilities, but unfortunately—he is very idle, and has been let to please himself. We shall both have something of our own when we come of age,—not much, but enough to make us independent; and I fear the knowledge that it is not absolutely necessary, makes Harry still more disinclined to do anything.”

“I see. But what a pity! I think it so much better for all men to have some employment. It seems a disgrace for those who have strength and talents, to be throwing them away without compunction:—leading an idle, aimless life. I only wonder that they have not more ambition.”

“I should have more,” cried Cecil, with enthusiasm. “I often think how glorious it would be to have the world before us, and the power to make ourselves a name; to *do* anything—*be* anything, we chose.”

“If we hapless women only had the chance,” said Beatrice. “To me nothing is so terrible as monotony—stagnation.”

Cecil seemed animated by a sudden hope, which burst forth in the following words:

“Oh, Beatrice! dear Beatrice, if you would only talk to Harry—try to influence him for good—endeavour to inspire him with some share of your own sentiments, it might be of use;—for he would think more of what *you* say than of a younger sister’s words. And I must confess the truth, I am very, very anxious about him. He seems so unsettled that I do not in the least know his intentions; whether he means to return to college, or—in short, whether he has any fixed plans for the future. I am sure that you will help me.”

“Willingly, if I have the power. Thank you, dear Cecil, for this proof of confidence. You may rely upon me to do all I can.”

“And thank you for your ready kindness,” was the answer. “I may seem in haste to trouble you about my own affairs; but indeed

I cannot help it, and it is not for myself alone."

"No, that it is not. Would that everybody were as free from selfishness."

"And Beatrice—may I ask one question? Does my uncle sit up smoking *every* night?"

Beatrice guessed the reason and full import of this question, and she sighed deeply as she answered:

"Yes, I wish that it were otherwise; and that is a still stronger reason why Harry should find some employment elsewhere. Nothing is so bad as want of occupation and irregular hours; and he must fall into the ways of those he lives with. Therefore—"

But here the door opened to admit Harry himself, who entered, looking rather pale and languid. Cecil bestowed a quick, cautionary look on Beatrice, and turned to meet her brother; laying a soft white hand upon his shoulder, whilst she asked:

"How are you this morning, dear? Did you sleep well? I fear that you were rather late."

"Middling," returned Harry, carelessly answering her three questions in one, as he passed on to say "Good morning," to his cousin.

"We did not expect to see you down so early," she remarked; "and accordingly we were threatening one another with a *tête-à-tête*."

"I fear I have disappointed you," he answered, with one of the arch looks which sometimes lighted up his countenance. "But it is not so very early, is it?"

"Not so very," said Beatrice, smiling. "In fact in well-regulated houses this would be considered quite a shocking hour."

Harry laughed.

"I am afraid then that you are quite a dissipated family. You quite shock my morals. I must endeavour to effect a reform."

"By setting us a better example? I, for one, shall be really proud to follow it."

"Of course. You will have to set about your work by six o'clock."

So saying, he looked at Beatrice so saucily that she could not refrain from laughing; glad to see his shyness giving place to confidence, such as near relations ought to feel towards one another. His impertinent expression was a wonderful improvement, and she now not only thought him handsome, but quite pleasant looking; and a new hope awoke, that a young man of such a naturally good disposition might be easily influenced to do what was right. Yet still the echo of her own reflections struck her painfully.

“Easily influenced! Ah, there lies the danger. Easily led for either good or evil. His is one of those soft yielding characters which, like the sea-sand, receiving all impressions, never retain any very long. And in the end which influence will prove most powerful? Which most likely to prevail? I will do my utmost; yet, I fear! I fear!”

Whilst thus reflecting, Cecil was anxiously watching her countenance, in the hope of reading her real sentiments; but fortunately

they were hidden from her scrutiny ; and the next moment they were both aroused by hearing Harry, who had wandered to the window, suddenly exclaim with boyish emphasis and disregard of ceremony :

“ Well, your garden is not in very first-rate order ! Why don’t you set to work to clear away all those weeds ? ”

“ Oh, Harry ! what a rude remark ! ” cried Cecil.

“ A very true one,” said Beatrice, with a smile. “ But I beg leave to say that nevertheless I do work very hard to keep things straight.”

“ Oh, I daresay ! ” was the incredulous reply.

“ Sir, you are impertinent, and if you don’t mind, I shall make you set to work. But now, come to breakfast. Will you have some tea ? ”

“ Tea ? ” repeated Harry, looking up at her, as he recalled his uncle’s strictures on the subject. “ Is it allowable ? I thought it was forbidden.”

Beatrice laughed, and handed him a cup.

“Why, I think cold water would not prove invigorating.”

“No,—not exactly;” Harry paused and smiled to himself; then added, as if with the hope of shocking his cousin: “But I know some fellows who drink beer for breakfast.”

“Horrible creatures! Do not mention them! And mind *you* never follow their example.”

“Oh, dear no! I have not quite arrived at *that* pitch of depravity at present;—though, you know, Beatrice, even ladies used to do the same in good Queen Bess’s days, and I believe were all the stronger for it too. What do you say to *that*?”

“I say it does not suit *my* notions. ‘Drink beer, think beer,’ says the proverb.”

Harry looked a little disconcerted; yet he still stood upon the defensive.

“Nay, I do not see why that need be the case. You would not have us all teetotalers?”

"No, I do not go so far as that,—so long as you can exercise moderation. Beer is a very wholesome beverage, and I have no particular objection to it in its proper place—which is *not* upon the breakfast-table. You may have some coffee if you like."

"No, thank you," said her cousin, silenced by her arguments, and helping himself to some broiled ham with rather a shaking hand, though Beatrice was glad to see he was as yet able to make a very fair repast.

"I am glad that so much smoking has not spoiled your appetite."

"So much? Why, who has told you so? Not Cecil, surely? I assure you that I smoke but very little."

"I say so from what I have observed; but perhaps last evening's indulgence was an exceptional case?"

Harry coloured, and made no reply; that is no *immediate* one, for after stirring his tea reflectively, he presently looked up and said triumphantly:

“Why, you know a little smoking aids digestion.”

“A *little*,” repeated Beatrice. “It must be a *very* little then ; though I think that if people are in good health, they don’t want such stimulus at all ; and if not—but I have not time to combat that last observation, for here comes my mother.”

And even as she spoke, Mrs. Mordaunt joined them, and the conversation became more general.

END OF VOL. I.

